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THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE :: :: :: :: PROPHET OF CARMEL

THE LIFE AND TIMES
OF THE
PROPHET OF CARMEL

BY

MOST REV. P. E. MAGENNIS

Ord. Carm. Alumnus Prov. Hibern.

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DEDICATION

TO THE MIGHTY ARMY ENCAMPED ON CARMEL FROM THE DAYS OF THE GREAT PROPHET UNTIL THE PRESENT TIME; TO THE MULTITUDINOUS COMMUNITIES OF MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE FOLLOWED IN THE SPIRIT OF "THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS" FROM THE YEARS OF THE SUCCESSOR OF THE FOUNDER, ELISEUS, UNTIL THE DAYS OF "THE LITTLE FLOWER"; TO THE NUMBERLESS ARMY OF THE WEARERS OF THE BROWN SCAPULAR WHO IN THEIR OWN HUMBLE WAY HAVE TRIED TO FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE PROPHET OF CARMEL AND WHO HAVE BEEN STRENGTHENED BY THAT VISION OF CARMEL'S QUEEN WHICH GAVE THEM A HABIT AS A SIMILAR VISION HAD GIVEN HIM AN ORDER—

The Life and Times of the Prophet of Carmel

IS RESPECTFULLY AND YET FERVENTLY DEDICATED BY ONE WHO IS THE LEAST OF ALL THE BRETHREN IN EVERYTHING SAVE IN HIS LOVE FOR CARMEL AND ITS GLORIOUS QUEEN.

The Author.

THE SEVENTH CENTENARY OF THE CONFIRMATION OF THE CARMELITE RULE BY HONORIUS III *(Jan. 30th, 1226).*

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

COLLEGIO S. ALBERTO, ROME,

Feast of the Nativity of B.V.M., 1925.

We have presumed to name the present study " The Life and Times of the Prophet of Carmel." A candid confession will be our best apology for daring to usurp the word " Life," which has to-day its own specific and well-determined signification. The fact, at least as it appears to us, is that no " Life " has ever been written of the Great Hebrew Prophet; indeed, no " Life " may ever be written of him. True it is that the Inspired Pen has raised him resplendently over all and every one of his contemporaries. Equally true is it that his acts, hall-marked by heaven, have flashed like lightning and seared with indelible ink the pages of history. Nevertheless, there is no full or even satisfying record of the " Life " of Israel's man of God. Descriptions of him and his times, narratives of his daring, forevisions of the things yet to be done by him—all these we have in plenty, but the fact remains, we have no full and satisfying record of this most interesting character who moved with such majesty along the stage of Hebrew history and of Christian pageant.

Need we then repeat that we have written no " Life " of Elias. We have taken the word in its widest acceptation, and we use it because no other word occurs to us that will so well give expression to our attempt to recall the memory of the Prophet of Fire.

We have merely endeavored to give a background on which the Founder of monasticism may move in his great mission of preparing the chosen people for the coming of the Messias. More we have not done; and

even that meagre achievement has fallen far short of our expectations. We ourselves are not disappointed at our failure, even though our readers may not feel pleased with our effort. When tempted to despair at giving expression to some of the characteristics of the Prophet we turned to the Biblical narrative and there we found new courage. If our poor attempt would turn the minds of our readers to the Sacred Page to study the mighty figure of Elias therein described in not a few of the important acts of public life, our labor has not been in vain, our effort has not been fruitless.

Had we all the material for a perfect " Life " of Elias, there would be still wanting the oriental mind that could grasp in all their meaning those various phases of human action incomprehensible to the Western mind with its slow mode of thought and its sluggish imagination. Those who have accustomed themselves to the contemplative life can find enjoyment in piecing together the Biblical facts narrated of the Prophet, an enjoyment quite unknown to the industrious student or the man of the world. We have many so-called " Lives " of the Prophet, which are nothing else than mere series of meditations—interesting only to those who know the art of spiritual self-instruction.

To the Very Reverend Prior of San Clemente of Rome, Father Garde, who is also a Professor of Scripture in the famous Dominican University called the " Angelico," we tender our heartfelt thanks for his kind revision of the following pages. He himself had travelled all the itinerary of the Prophet and was thus well equipped to help by suggestion. Our friendship of long years, we fear very much, may have restrained him from using his blue pencil as liberally as his critical faculty demanded. We should not dream even for a moment that he holds all the opinions to which we have given expression in the following pages. He recognised

that the work was intended to supply a want often felt amongst humble and less-learned followers of "The Prophet of Carmel." We have rigidly kept out of the study all Arabic, Greek and Latin technical terms—replacing them with English equivalents. This course is followed throughout, because our study is not intended to be other than an instructive, yet simple and brief, story of Elias and his times.

FOREWORD

COLLEGIO S. ALBERTO,
VIA SFORZA PALLAVICINI, 10,
ROMA (13).

MOST REV. FATHER,

Your Paternity asks me to write a brief foreword to the study that you are about to publish on the life and times of the Prophet of Carmel. To sketch even briefly the career of the great Thesbite must be, indeed, a labor of love for one who knows that he is amongst the spiritual descendants of " the sons of the prophets." It is likewise a labor of love for me to contribute my meed of praise to one who has undertaken the present study.

My motive, then, is twofold in writing the desired foreword, namely, a deep and reverent devotion to him whom we call our common Father, and to express the fraternal friendship which I bear to you as a brother Carmelite.

Need I tell you, Most Reverend Father, that the idea that prompted you to undertake the present study, that is to say, to make the great Prophet better known, is one that I commend from my heart, and that, too, for very many reasons. It would be a mere waste of time to ask the question—" Is the great Thesbite known to-day as he should be known amongst the Christian nations?" He is not. If we except those who are well versed in the pages of Holy Writ, very few know of the wonderful life of the man of God and those marvellous acts that seem lost in the dimness of so many centuries passed. No one may doubt the spiritual treasures to

be gathered from the recalling of his glory and his zeal. Still less may they doubt of the mighty influence of his example as the instrument of the God of Israel.

Had we nothing else about the Prophet than that extraordinary eulogy written by the inspired pen in the Book of Ecclesiasticus (Cap. 48), we should be moved to fix our mental gaze on the elect figure of the Hebrew Seer. The sentiments so expressive and so forceful of the Holy Ghost were, indeed, a sufficient reason to excite our admiration and to demand our homage and to beseech the God of Israel for courage to imitate his noble deeds.

When we, with souls full of the true spirit of piety and imbued with that reverence that all should have whilst perusing the Sacred Page, meditate upon the account of the life and works of Elias as presented to us in the Third and Fourth Books of Kings, then it is that we come to a true knowledge of this chosen man of God, then it is that we are pervaded with a sense of deep admiration and profound veneration for the instrument selected by God to do His Holy Will in Israel. We are wonderfully moved at the majestic figure of this solitary hermit called to do battle before princes and potentates and who has no other weapons save prayer and a burning zeal. A reverential awe creeps into our souls as we think of him preparing the way for the Messias even in those distant times; and with what admirable judgment he measures out zeal and prudence and mercy and justice to prepare men for the fulness of time.

Centuries then roll by, and when the Desired of nations is about to come on earth, a mighty Voice is heard in the wilderness announcing the approach of the Son of Man. No greater eulogy can be given to him who is making the proximate preparation for the great Advent than that " he is Elias that is to come," and

that his burning words and ascetic life recall to the minds of the children of Israel him who was chosen nigh on a thousand years before for the self-same mission then so distant. People justly applied to John the Baptist what was already told of his predecessor in the mission of preparation—" Elias, the Prophet, arose, like a fire, and his word was like unto a burning lamp."

The Christian soul still finds food for deep and abiding thought whilst meditating on that glorious scene that once crowned the heights of Thabor. There, with Moses, stands the Prophet of Carmel bearing witness to the Mission of the Son of Man. Ages may come and ages may go and that scene will be to every child of the Church an inspiration incomprehensible in great part, if you will, but nevertheless consoling and encouraging. Thabor has made the name of Elias a cherished memory in the annals of the Church of God—and for all ages.

You have done well, then, Most Reverend Father, to write the life of Elias, the Prophet of Carmel. May your book make him better known, better loved. It is sure to kindle in many readers the desire to meditate upon the life of the man of God as told in Chronicles of the Kings, and thus it is that the fruit of your undertaking cannot fail to be plentiful and comforting as well as strengthening. Centuries have rolled away since Elias, in the cause of truth, defied Achab and his cruel consort Jezabel, but who would be so bold as to declare that truth to-day does not require such champion when it is abused by those in high places and by the children of the world? To-day we are face to face with a new paganism. To-day we see on every side idols whose worship ruins the souls of men and draws them from their Creator; to these idols the best gifts of nature and grace are shamefully prostituted.

Materialism is as rampant in these our times as it was in the days of Elias. No doubt God will call forth in due time a mighty warrior, and the hosts of darkness shall be put to rout; nevertheless, we must all be prepared and have the necessary courage to do our duty in the cause of truth and, directed by the Infallible Voice from the Chair of Peter, we must wage war against the enemy of the Lord God of hosts and that, too, with the zeal of Elias and with his prudence as well as with his dauntless courage. Your study on the life of the great Prophet is, indeed, opportune.

I must not end my foreword before I make mention of another aspect of the life of the Prophet of Carmel which commends itself to many who may not be called upon to do the soldier's part in Christian warfare. Time has not lessened in any way our admiration for the charity of the widow of Sarephta of Sidonia. That touching episode in the life of the man of God has its lesson for us, as it has had its lesson for all ages. Death had threatened the lives of herself and her boy; starvation stared them in the face, nevertheless, her charity is not numbed, neither is her trust in God's Providence destroyed. Unknown to herself she enters into a silent contest with the man of God as to which has the greater confidence in the God of Israel. It is truly a magnificent example to the children of the Church through every age. Rich, indeed, was her reward, and Elias is made the worthy medium of her recompense. She receives the most precious return that she could then desire—and it comes through the grateful heart of him whom she has succoured in his dire distress. *In tempore opportuno* all comes to the faithful and trusting soul—this is the truth impressed upon us by the story of the widow of Sarephta.

I need not refer to the types and figures that are to be discerned in the life of the Prophet, types and figures

that clearly vision the wondrous gifts that are to come to the children of the Church, especially that " gift of all gifts," the Blessed Sacrament, which will give us the strength and energy to walk to the Mount of God, where He will manifest Himself to us all in the magnificence of His glory. The prefiguring of the Sacraments of the Church is at once apparent, but the beauty and force of the type or figure come only to those who share in the contemplative life of the Father and Founder of monastic institutions.

One thought must yet be recorded, and it is the last. From the top of Carmel Elias saw the little cloud arise from the sea. It spread itself in the heavens and then fell in great showers of rain that vivified the earth parched by drought for three years and a half. In this little cloud the Fathers of the Church would see a symbol of the Blessed Virgin who gave to the world dead in sin the fruit of her Blessed Womb. As we meditate on this vision of our Prophet we feel drawn by a special veneration to the Mother of God whose divine Son gave life and light and grace to the human race long dead in sin. To the Carmelite this vision has its own consolation as well as its own special significance.

Your Paternity has done well to write of Elias and his times. May the good God bless your work. May He render it fruitful for the souls of men and women tired with continual striving for the spiritual life and for the truth that leads to it. This is the fervent prayer of

Your humble Brother in Carmel,

Fr. Raffaelo, C.D.,

Titular-Archbishop of Thessalonica.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.—His Grace the Titular-Archbishop of Thessalonica, Monsignor Raphael Charles Rossi, is one of the most learned members of the Order to which he belongs. He is the present Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of the Consistory, and although a most humble Religious he has been for many years one of the distinguished figures of ecclesiastical life in the Holy City. We welcome his foreword as a testimony to the loyalty of the Carmelite Order to their ancient and valued traditions. His Grace is one of the recognised masters of the Italian tongue, hence our difficulty in obtaining a translation that would do justice to his succinct and forceful preface.

ELIAS, THE PROPHET OF CARMEL

CHAPTER I

THE PROPHET OF CARMEL

Some men are so fortunate that the story of their lives is woven with threads of gold into the web of their nation's history. As often as the records of the people are perused, so often are the memories of such men recalled with honor. More fortunate still are those whose fame has not been limited to the pages of their nation's history and, if the devastating hand of time were to lay in ruins the land of their birth, or if the narrative of their nation's deeds were consigned to the dusty shelves of some seldom-visited library, they should nevertheless find commemoration in the records of other nations and mention in the tongues of other peoples. The literature of the world will never refuse them entrance to its pages. The time shall never come when their triumphs and their failures shall have ceased to interest the children of men. They have been, and are, and shall be, beacons to the tempest-tossed mariners on the sea of life—lights to guide in darkness, signals to warn of hidden dangers to the toiling wayfarers. Quite true, their lives may not overmuch interest the lowly plodders who keep to the beaten path and the monotonous level, but to the men of big resolve and daresome soul they shall never cease be an inspiration.

This wondrous power that they hold over men and ages seems to arise from the message committed to them

by One greater than they, by One who has searched the hearts of men and knows the influences that mould for good the characters of the children of the world. There are times when men seem to hunger for a message and, having heard it, they are prepared to obey and to act although the costs be terrible. The aftermath of the message may be suffering and sorrow, and shame and death, but the memory of the men who brought the message grows dearer to the hearts of those who have heard and obeyed, and to the hearts of their children's children, hence, we find these messengers enshrined in the honoured niches of the historical galleries of mankind—and none so bold as to question their right to have a place therein.

Elias, the Prophet of Carmel, was to all intents and purposes an Israelite. He was certainly born within, or near to, the confines of the Land of Promise. He has woven himself into the history of his nation in such manner that he who has learned aught of Israel must as a consequence have heard of the greatest of Hebrew prophets. " The Sceptre has passed from Juda " and the children of the Promise are scattered, far and wide, to the four corners of the earth, but the Rabbi still tells to the remnants of his people the story of the Prophet of Fire. Centuries have passed since Elias was wafted in his fiery chariot to the celestial lands, but, we are solemnly assured, he appears to the faithful Jew who has spoken with him in the busy cities of the old world and in the trade marts of the new world. In the lands of their exile he comes to their feasts and watches over their ritual lest the truth that he loved should pass away in the midst of the profanities of the Gentile world. To us who judge only by appearances it would seem that the Hebrew child is less mindful of Jahveh who led them from bondage to the Land of Promise than he is of Jahveh's favorite Prophet who undoubtedly

typifies for him the Law and the Prophets, and recalls the glorious traditions of his ancient nation.

If we were to confine our researches to the career of the Prophet of Carmel, as he lived and moved in the land of his birth, our knowledge, interesting and wonderful as it might be, should of necessity be rather meagre. Hence we must rivet our gaze on the majestic figure of the Prophet as he passes adown the corridors of time, speaking to other peoples and influencing other territories, until we are forced to view him in the light of a world-possession. The Catholic Church has adopted him as one of its favored children. On the Twentieth of each July the choirs of the monks resound with the praises of the Prophet of Carmel, and, on the same day, it is the privilege of the Priests to associate the name and the deeds of Elias with the sublime Sacrifice of the Altar. The Church is anxious to keep before the eyes of her faithful children the example of him who could justly exclaim—" with zeal have I been zealous for the Lord God of hosts." The Mohammedan writers know that the Prophet has found favorable mention in the Koran and the Moslem warriors have seen his figure marching at their head and leading them on to battle. The Bedouin knows the places where Elias rested in his journeys through the deserts, and not infrequently sees him once more at the wells or under the shady Broom of his oriental home. The man of peace has seen him in the little oratories that have arisen to the Prophet's honor; the warrior has seen him leading on the hosts of righteousness, flashing aloft his fiery sword. Thus it is that his memory invades the solitudes of the deserts, and is found in the busy centres of the east and the west, of the north and the south. Thus it is that men are so full of that memory that it takes shape, and form, and life, and action, and that, too, even to the present day.

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Five hundred years after " his passing " the prophet Malachy tells of his final appearance on the world's stage, speaking of the Prophet as if he were of yesterday. A thousand years after he had been taken up to heaven in his fiery chariot, the Baptist, whose burning words went home to the hearts of men, was asked the question: " Art thou Elias?"—so fresh was the memory of him who thundered the truth into the ears of the kings of Israel.

The name of Elias has seized on the peoples of Christian lands in a peculiar manner. In the thirteenth century, owing to the persecutions of the Saracens, a colony of monks came to Europe and brought with them their traditions and history. They boldly claimed that they were the spiritual sons of the Prophet of Carmel. Inhabitants of the " Holy Mount " had adapted their rule of life to accord with the principles of the new Christian creed, so that, even in the lifetime of the Redeemer of men, there were faithful followers on the " Holy Mount " of the Faith preached by Him. The caves of Carmel, then, had sheltered for centuries men who were faithful to the Rule of the Prophet and to the Faith of the Catholic Church. The monks, newly-arrived, strongly maintained that they were the spiritual children of those early Christian ascetics, and so merited their name and their prestige. Challenged again and again as to their right to this great privilege, they have clung to it, and seemingly with no little success. The traveller who enters the most beautiful shrine that has ever been raised to the glory of the One True God, namely, the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome, will notice close to the principal altar a statue of the Prophet of Israel, and underneath the figure is inscribed: " Erected by the whole Carmelite Order to their Founder Elias, the Prophet."

On the Mount of Carmel there has been erected a

beautiful shrine on a site hoary with age and sacred in associations. It looks over the scenes of the former triumphs of the Prophet of Carmel. The Priests who offer sacrifice there, in that august Temple, will tell you that they are assuredly the spiritual children of the Great Prophet of Israel.

The East told the story of Elias to the West, and now the West repays its debt in a right generous manner. When there is a question of the Prophet of Carmel, the years in which we live refuse to yield to any past epochs in admiration or reverence for the Thesbite. Time, that seems to be in all else unconquered and unconquerable, has failed to dim the memory of him who has been justly named " El Kader " (" the Evergreen "), and to lessen the interest of men in the mightiest of all the Prophets of the Hebrew people.

He who would attempt even a passing description of this wonderful Hebrew must of necessity enter on his work " in fear and trembling." He has, however, one assurance, namely, that if he fail to do justice to this majestic scriptural personage, so, too, have, thus far, all his biographers, save the one who tells the story of his life and his mission in the sublime language of the Old Testament. To show how absolutely we are dependent on this source for all our true and definite information, we have recourse again and again to the inspired Writer. Indeed, we may well make the confession of what will not escape the notice of any who peruse our pages—we have brought into our passing biograph nearly every single sentence, if not every word, to be found in the records of the Books of the Kings of Juda and Israel. In no other way could we more clearly reveal our intense admiration for the brief yet sublime, imperfect yet exceeding-full, biography of the Prophet of Carmel written nigh on three thousand years ago.

CHAPTER II

THE BIRTH OF THE PROPHET

"The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes"—Shakespeare thus aptly gives expression in poetical form to a fancy that has been the heirloom of men for many a generation. Time was, when we might have called this fancy an universal belief. Nay more, there were not wanting authorities who maintained that the Inspired Word bore witness to the reasonableness of their belief. What more natural, it might be asked, than that the heavens should show their sympathy, or express their joy, at the happenings on the earth below? If we admit a heavenly exposition of sorrow at the passing of the great ones of the world, it seems equally reasonable to expect that the heavens will not remain silent when noble lives are being ushered into the realm of earth. If Providence has destined certain mortals to do great things for the race, it is just and proper to expect that the grief shown by the heavens at the "passing" will be in proportion to the joy expressed at the "coming," for, surely, those two transitions are co-relatives.

Sane and reputable writers have told us wonderful stories of the heavenly expressions at the death of the favored children of nature. Just as sane and, certainly, just as reputable writers have narrated the extraordinary concomitant or antecedent events that occurred at the birth of those who were destined to do great things in the world. Pious writers have not been the only ones who rejoiced to note those evidences that gave a halo of heavenly romance to the characters whom they would extol, and place before us, meaner mortals, as leaders and masters.

The biblical narrative, to all appearances, at least as it has been handed down to us, knows nothing of any wonderful manifestations at the birth of the Prophet Elias, although it dwells longingly and, we might add, lovingly on his magnificent temporary exit from life. The history of the Prophet begins in a rather disconcerting manner, as can be ascertained from a reference to the seventeenth chapter of the Third Book of Kings. There is no mention of his father or of his mother; the year of his birth is not even hinted at; and as for the place of his nativity—that which is written leaves every thing in confusion and in doubt. Some of the old writers have recalled that he comes to us as did Melchisedeck, the first of the sacerdotal line, " without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life." He appears on the biblical stage without any introduction, and he is not only prepared for action, but we find him actually entered on his *rôle* as Prophet and messenger of the God of Israel. True, indeed, one may read again and again the scriptural narrative without adverting to the abruptness of his entrance into the stirring drama of the people of God. He enters so naturally into the historical tableau, and he so masterfully takes his place therein as if he alone could fill the part, that one never dreams of questioning his appearance or of asking his credentials. The mission that has been committed to him and his manner of fulfilling it so absorb the attention and satisfy the mind that curiosity gives place to surprise and wonder, and doubt disappears in the majesty of his presence.

What the inspired Writer did not do, or rather did not wish to do, the admirers and the followers of the Prophet have accomplished with all the wealth of worshipful oriental imagination.

In what proposes to be a mere sketch, as is the present

work, it would be entirely out of place to refer to all the various legends and stories to be found in profane and sacred authors anent the birth of Elias. To omit every mention of them would be disappointing, if not misleading, because the reader should be deprived of at least a passing view of one phase—and that an important one—of the extraordinary fascination that the man of God exercised on the imagination as well as the spirit of the people of God. We may, then, with all due regard to those who despise all save hard facts in biography, refer in a very brief manner to the legends and stories that have found favor with those whose character is shielded from charges of over-credulity by their great authority amongst the reputable writers of the Church's history. It will be interesting to all, even though it may not be instructive to some, if for a moment we glance at the legend that can be found in the writings of the imitators of the Prophet and which must doubtless have occupied much of the contemplative hours of those who have called Elias "their Father and Founder."

It is thus that one of the German biographers of the Prophet tells the story of his birth: "On that occasion his father is said to have had a vision, and in this vision he saw a number of men dressed in white and shining garments. They were standing around the child and were wrapping him in swaddling bands of fire. Afterwards they gave him to eat of food that was composed of flames of living fire. All this was done in a manner that spoke of their deepest reverence for the child." This is more or less the story told by the Rabbinical writers, who seem to revel in all that could foretell, or presage, the future greatness of their unique Prophet.

Substantially this same legend finds a place in many of the lives of Elias written by the early Christian writers.

Naturally the story is embellished with many notes that savor of the influence of the Prophet in the days that followed the coming of the Messias.

Amongst these later writers we find many interesting divergencies. In some of the biographies it is stated that those who received the child from the arms of his mother were not men but angels dressed in the garments that were to be the peculiar property of the prophetic band of which Elias was to be the founder. In others it is mentioned that the child coming forth from the mother's womb was encircled with flames of fire, whereas in the older story of the Hebrew chroniclers the child is received by men dressed in white and they wrap the baby in swaddling garments that are really "flames of fire." According to some writers, the mother gives the new-born babe "liquid fire" for its food, whereas others would have it that the baby is taken from the mother and is fed by the men who were present to salute it at its entrance into the world, and the food is "blazing flames." This last conception is expressed with a not inconsiderable amount of artistic skill in some old paintings that may be found in several of the Carmelite Convents.

Notwithstanding all the accidental differences, the important parts of the legend are everywhere the same; and everywhere the story is named the Vision of Sabbach, or Sobac, the father of the Prophet.

The old writers who relate the legend are careful to give its peculiar significance. "The family of Elias was come to great distinction and he was to be a fire to all Israel, and it was by the fire of his mouth that the Hebrew people should be judged. In a word, it was indicative of the man and his mission."

As might be expected, this legend got a new signification in the days that followed the preaching of the Gospel. The Greatest of all teachers told the

people when He was speaking of the Baptist—" He is Elias that is to come." And Saint Luke, narrating the visit of the Blessed Virgin to her cousin Saint Elizabeth, recalls an event that has given much cause for discussion amongst theologians—" and it came to pass, that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb." The words of Elizabeth are recorded by the sacred writer—" For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy." As a deduction from this biblical narrative theologians have asserted that John the Baptist was cleansed from sin in the womb of his mother. Encouraged, then, by the declared resemblance between the Baptist and Elias, the followers and the disciples of the latter went a step further and maintained that this resemblance should be found in the birth of each, consequently, there arose a pious idea that the Prophet of Israel had been born into the world without the stain of original sin.

It is easy, then, to see the significance that the legend told of the birth of Elias would find in the hearts, and consequently in the writings, of those devoted sons of the Prophet. He would, thus, be the first since the " fall of man " to have enjoyed this singular privilege. No wonder that the heavens should express their gladness at the event of his birth, being, as it would have been, a faint type of the things that were to be privileged to Her who has been aptly named the " Sinless Creature."

We have referred to this interesting piece of information regarding the birth of the Prophet as a legend and as a story, nevertheless, it is to be understood that there is no desire to question the authenticity or the genuinity of the narration. We read of many such extraordinary visions vouchsafed to parents at such critical times—some of which no one would think of

questioning. It is within the limits of reasonable conjecture that the narration of the event has come to us through a sane and reliable tradition, and that the first writer to commit to history the interesting topic was only the bearer, and not the manufacturer, of the vision of Sabbach. In so far as it is an alleged vision, there is nothing intrinsically incompatible in anything connected with it, being, as it is stated, nothing save a shadowing forth of the things that were to come and could be so expressed in type and figure.

Should the vision be the outcome of the meditations of some perfervid disciple of Elias, doubtless the men or, as some have asserted, angels robed in white garments would be the followers of the first Carmelite religious whose recognised habit—at least in the beginnings of the prophetic Institution—was made of the snowy-white skin of the mountain goat. The fire with which the child was fed and which was also the element that composed his swaddling clothes could, surely, be nothing else than the fiery words and the still more fiery actions of him who has been justly styled the "Prophet of Fire." One of his French biographers has nicely expressed this solution as to the origin of the vision which has been attributed to Sabbach—"It seems as if this man had the thunder of the Lord for a soul, and that the element in which he was borne to heaven was the one in which he was brought forth."

CHAPTER III

THE NAME OF THE PROPHET

It was generally after the ceremony of circumcision that the new-born child received its name. When the sponsors for the child had been selected, the persons privileged to be present at the function were assembled in the house or the synagogue. The women chosen by the mother brought the babe to the door of the place where the circumcision was about to be performed. It was then taken into the arms of the person who was to hold it during the operation. Certain ceremonies were to be gone through and certain invocations were to be made, after which the name was given to the child. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the vision was attributed to Sabbach, the father of Elias; this conception of its origin is in accord with the then-custom, for the father seems to have had the prior right to name the child and, hence, the vision should of necessity be his, so that he could give the expressive name, even though it had not been his own, nor had it, perhaps, been in the family in preceding generations.

We have remarked that this was the general mode of conferring the name, but there is evidence of other ways. In the Book of Ruth it is written of the child of Noemi—"And Noemi taking the child laid it in her bosom, and she carried it, and was a nurse unto it. And the women her neighbors, congratulating with her and saying: There is a son born to Noemi; called his name Obed." Here it is the neighbors who had the naming of the child from the peculiar circumstances of its birth. This same right seems to be still in existence

in the time of Zachary, the father of the Baptist—" And it came to pass that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child and they called him by his father's name Zachary. And his mother answering said: Not so, but he shall be called John "; nevertheless the father had the final word. The right exercised by the father seemed to pass to the mother when the father was either dead or for some reason could not be present. We have an instance of this recorded in the First Book of Kings. When the daughter-in-law of Samuel had brought forth, at a critical and lamentable period in the history of the people of God, her first-born—" she called the child Ichabod, saying: The glory is gone from Israel, because the ark of the Lord was taken, and for her father-in-law and her husband. And she said: The glory is departed from Israel, because the ark of God was taken."

Hence, we see that a name might be the result of some fortuitous circumstance, just as it might be a repetition of some name long honored in the family. It could be very well the result of a vision such as some of the biographers of the Prophet intimate had been vouchsafed to Sabbach, his father. In the event of the name not being a family name, and if we totally disregard the vision, the coincidence of the name and the career of the Prophet is certainly more than remarkable. We must not lay aside the other, and not too improbable, suggestion that the name may have been gifted to him because of his life and his life's work by those who preserved the memory of him in the sacred pages and in the records of history. Were it not for the circumstances intimately connected with, and their important bearing on, the birth of the Messias, the name " John " given to the Precursor might have remained unnoticed and unknown; he should have, then, been known to us by the very important name of " the Baptist," a name that forcibly brings to the minds of all Christians

the mission he was called upon to fulfil in the preparing for the coming of Our Lord's Kingdom on earth.

We are on sure and certain ground when we say that on his first appearance in the pages of biblical history the Prophet bears the name Elias—" And Elias the Thesbite of the inhabitants of Galaad said to Achab : As the Lord liveth, the God of Israel, in whose sight I stand "—and, then, he proceeds to declare his message. In this passage we have not only the name of the Prophet, but we have also the very meaning, or rather the real signification, of the name. By the very best biblical scholars the meaning of " Elias " is given as " Jehovah is my God." The other significations given are almost the same—at least as to meaning—" Yahveh is my strength " and " Yahveh is God." Some of the more ancient commentators, who were not so well-versed in the Semitic languages, would derive the name from the Greek word which is singularly like to Elias in form, but, in reality, it means " the sun." There is, however, more than an external resemblance of the words. According to pagan mythology the sun-god drove his fiery steeds across the heavens, and as he mounted the distant vaults the rays from his chariot fell directly on the earth and, thus, the heat was extreme, but as he descended, the rays lost much of their effect until finally he had completed his circuit—and this was his daily course. We know from the biblical narrative that the Prophet disappeared from the earth in a chariot drawn by fiery steeds. It is at once apparent how confusion might arise as to Elias, especially in the minds of those acquainted with the Greek language and mythology.

A passing knowledge of the Hebrew language showed how incorrect it was to allow the external form of the name of the Prophet to recall any connection with the pagan sun-god. As a matter of fact, the word " Elias,"

in its Hebrew form, is composed of three elements, each of which has its own peculiar signification; in the combination which we see in the name " Elias " it can have only the signification above attached to it—" God is my strength."

We have taken it for granted, but only for the present, that the Prophet was of the Hebrew race, or at least so connected with it that he was a participator in its rites and its ceremonies. The lesson in the Divine Office for the twentieth of July, the day on which is celebrated the Feast of the Prophet, tells us very plainly—" Elias the Prophet was from the confines of Arabia and of the tribe of Aaron a Levite." In this assertion the Breviary is following a very common tradition in regard to the origin of Elias, hence, we have spoken of the rites and ceremonies that should be the accompaniment of a Hebrew child's " naming-day."

Were we to admit, as some have boldly asserted, that Elias was of the Gentiles, rather than the offspring of the chosen people, nevertheless, we need not modify radically our theory as to his " name-day," neither ought we to seek other circumstances to account for the significance of the name given. To look for the ceremony of circumcision just as the Hebrews carried it out, and with the same deep and reverent meaning, is to expect too much. One of his biographers has written—" Some, indeed, have supposed that Elias was not Hebrew in his origin at all—that the blood of roving Ishmael was in his veins—that he sprang from a tribe of Gentiles who inherited from the patriarch Abraham the knowledge of the one true God, and retained it longer than the heathens around, owing to their proximity to the land of Canaan."

It is well to remark that outside the tribes of the chosen people there were allied friends and fiercely antagonistic enemies who shared in the same belief in

the one true God. And just as to-day the ceremony of Baptism, in what pertains to its external form, is not confined to the Catholic Church, so also in those times not a few who were not born in the families that composed the twelve tribes had adopted the beliefs, and in part the ceremonies, of the Hebrew people. This union of ritual and doctrine notwithstanding, social relations would be more likely to find favor with those Gentiles if the ceremony had also the added assurance of health-conservation.

There are two other names which have been applied to designate him even more than his family name of Elias, namely, the "Prophet of Fire," and the "Prophet of Carmel." Again and again, do his biographers use those titles, and no one seems to doubt who is meant when those expressive phrases are used in the history of the chosen people. Since they give us an insight to two different aspects of his life, we may now refer to the reasons for so naming him, or rather for the bestowing of such titles.

"The Prophet of Fire" is one of the most befitting epithets applied to Elias. No wonder that holy men, meditating on the extraordinary life of the Prophet, should, if they found so much vision as we have before mentioned, visualize this man, whose words burned into the hearts of men and whose actions set aflame the very mountain-side, ushered into the world in the midst of that element which seemed to give the best expression of his innermost soul. Fire is irresistible, and nothing can withstand it; as we read the biblical narrative we see how irresistible was the word of the Prophet and how respondent the agencies of nature were to his behest. The hosts of Israel were stupefied at the devastation wrought by the fire that fell at the word of the Prophet on the Mount of Carmel. The soldiers of Ochosias were eaten up by the fiery blast that swept the

mountain-side at the command of Elias. When the God of Israel wished to show the Prophet a figure of His own life, He swept the hill-tops with a living flame so bright, so terrible, that the weary Prophet shaded, with his goat-skin cloak, his eyes from the awful fire-works of the Almighty. His magnificent exit from the land of Israel was in a chariot of fire, drawn by two fiery steeds. Like a fiery meteor he appears in the biblical story, and like a fiery meteor he gives his temporary adieu to the world. No wonder that the sacred writer tells of his works in language that expresses the idea here mentioned—" He stood up as fire and his word burned as a lamp." The inspired writer could find no more apt simile.

The second title, as applied to Elias, is just as significant, in a sense, as the first. It is oftener found in the pious writers of Christian times. The foundation for it is written large in the story as narrated in the Book of Kings. It has been asserted, and it neither can be proved nor yet disproved, that, even before he had made his appearance before King Achab, as related in the seventeenth chapter of the Third Book of Kings, he had been an inmate of the cells on the sacred Mount. We may not doubt that this holy place was frequented by such souls as Elias in the years that preceded the days of Achab. Still less can we question the fact that he retired to the solitude of the mountain after his greatest battle with the powers of evil in the land of Israel. It was on Mount Carmel that he gained his mightiest triumph over the false gods of Jezabel. Here, we know, were established colleges for the " Sons of the prophets." In the life-time of the man of God, this seems to have been his favorite abode. From his time until the advent of the Messias chosen souls had betaken themselves to that place of recollection, solitude and prayer, believing that they were imitating the great

Prophet; and they have appealed to his example as a justification of their manner of life; neither did they hesitate to call him their "Father and Founder." In the years that followed the mission of the Saviour of mankind, men from the Western world as well as men from the Eastern sought spiritual consolation in the caves of Carmel. Successors they were in their holy work to John the Baptist, who has been named by one of the great English historical writers "the first Christian Carmelite." It would be against a well-founded tradition to deny that there was a continuous line of hermits on the Mount of Carmel from the early Christian times until we find it peopled, in the Middle Ages, with bands of monks who claimed that Elias was their "Father and Founder." In or about the middle of the thirteenth century the Saracens invaded the holy Mount. After massacring the greater part of the hermits, they prohibited the residence of all Western visitors in the neighbourhood of Carmel. Not a few of the hermits escaped from the Holy Land and took up places in Europe, where they still continued to claim Elias as their "Founder and Father."

It will be at once evident why the son of Sabbach is in Christian times better known as the "Prophet of Carmel." This is the name given him by the multitudes who still hold to the traditions of the Order named from its place of origin—Mount Carmel.

CHAPTER IV

THE BIRTHPLACE OF ELIAS

In the biblical narrative Elias is called "the Thesbite" and, as a note of clearer distinction, it is added that he comes from the region of Galaad—"And Elias the Thesbite of the inhabitants of Galaad said to Achab." It might be inferred that in this brief account of the origin of the Prophet we had the important information as to his place of birth, and also an indication of the people or tribe whence he sprang. Unfortunately, we have nothing of the kind. As a matter of fact, the items recorded in the sacred biography are a hindrance, rather than a help, in obtaining accurate and satisfying information.

This fact is the more embarrassing when we advert to the biblical method of treating other and much less important personages. A casual reader of the Holy Scriptures would at once note the anxiety of the writers to give, as necessary information, the place of birth and the tribe or people to whom belongs the subject of their narration. When the biblical narrator wishes to introduce to his readers the work of Jeremias the Prophet, it is after the following manner he does so—"The words of Jeremias the son of Helcias, of the priests that were in Anathoth, in the land of Benjamin." And if we select some character who preceded the Prophet himself, we find Tobias thus described by his inspired biographer—"Tobias of the tribe and the city of Nephtali which is in the upper parts of Galilee above Naason, beyond the way that leadeth to the west, having on the right hand the city of Sephet." And this

is only an introduction to a fairly minute account of one who represents not much more than a certain phase in the life of the people of God. Were we to recall the minute description of the birth and parentage of him who was said to follow in the footsteps of Elias, namely, John the Baptist, we should be still more disappointed at the meagre and uncertain facts given of the origin of the mighty Prophet. It is, however, only just to remark that in all probability there was a time when the two facts narrated of the son of Sabbach conveyed exact information, even though the data must not even then have been over-full of information. If the complete records of King Achab had been committed to writing by some scribe immediately after the stirring events that are contained in the Book of Kings, it would not be so necessary to emphasise the Thesbe to which the writer alluded, for we may reasonably surmise there was then only one outstanding city of the name. The passing years have added to our burden in getting at a satisfactory account of the particular part of the Eastern world to which Elias belonged, because we have a choice between two cities of the same name. On the other hand, it is just possible that the locating of the place of birth of the Prophet was as difficult then as now. Thesbe may have been a city where the later activities of Elias were centred—that is to say, the activities during the time that preceded his selection for the great mission to Achab, and, so, may not have had the distinction to be the place of his birth.

This uncertainty is all the more peculiar because the information regarding the successor of the Prophet in the prophetic Institute is presented to us with sufficiently full information as to his place of nativity and as to his family—"And Eliseus the son of Saphat, of Abelmeula, thou shalt anoint to be prophet in thy room." Later on, in the same chapter, we find interest-

ing facts that give us a clear idea of the position in life occupied by the parents of his successor, and also of the manner of life, before he was made head of the prophetic Institution. We have the same interesting, and fairly satisfying, information in regard to some, if not all, of the great leaders of the Hebrew people. Not only have we the place of birth and the parentage of Moses and Samuel and David mentioned, but there are added interesting items of news which give us an insight to the times in which their lot was cast, and we have certain prophetic visions portraying the future of the men themselves. The lesson to be drawn from all these instances is that God may have had some design in leaving the description indefinite; it may have been that He so intended this lack of definite knowledge to rivet attention on the message.

Accepting, then, the meagre account given by the inspired writer in the Book of Kings, the total amount of our knowledge of the early life, as well as of the place of birth, is—"Elias was a Thesbite"; and, secondly, this Thesbe was situated within the confines of the regions known as Galaad. This information seems pleasing enough to the compilers of the Dictionary published by Vigouroux. In the article on Elias it is mentioned that he was of Thesbe, in the regions of Galaad. And when treating of the regions so named he incidentally remarks, and more than once, that the Thesbe of Elias was one of the cities of Galaad—"Thesbe, the native place of Elias the Galaadite." And, again, it is added—"The real glory of Galaad is to have been the place of the birth of Elias and to have shielded him from the fury of Achab and Jezabel." This is, undoubtedly, the more popular tradition; nevertheless, we must not forget that there was another city of the same name in Nephtali which can lay claim to the honor that has been given, less grudgingly, to the

Galaadite country. When we write of a "city" we do not wish to convey to our readers the idea of a city as we know such places of habitation to-day.

In the Septuagint the name of this city, or town, or village, or whatever it was, appears as the place from which Tobias was led away into captivity. The particulars as to its location are fairly accurate—"Thesbe is to the right, that is to say towards the south of Cydros in Nephtali." Cydros is in all probability another form of Kadis, or Cades, of which we have certain information. Those who prefer the Thesbe of Nephtali can account for the intense interest that the Prophet took in all that concerned Samaria, and for his deep and profound knowledge of the evils under which the country of Israel labored without calling upon the supernatural—save in so far as his mission was concerned. He had not even to cross the Jordan to become aware of the state of affairs in Samaria, for, accepting this city as his native place, he must have been well aware of all that was happening in the neighborhood of his childhood's home, and no extraordinary supernatural impulse was required to set his prophetic and zealous soul afire with indignation for the things that were fast creeping into the very vitals of the religious observances of the people who were his kinsfolk. Many other reasons could be adduced to prove that this Thesbe, more modern at the time, less in touch with the wild natures of the children of Galaad, was more suitable to be the place of birth and more likely to be a centre for the education of men who were in the future to be leaders of the people.

We must not forget that there is yet another aspect of this much-discussed question. It is quite possible that Elias may have spent the early years of his life in Thesbe of Nephtali, and then, in the pursuit of his vocation as a Levite or Priest, or, we may add, in com-

pliance with some mission committed to him, he may have gone to Thesbe of Galaad to sojourn for some time at least. This, no doubt, would give to him the right to be called " the Thesbite." We have not far to look for examples of titles coming in this manner to men of note, both in the ecclesiastical and the civil world, in biblical narrative and outside it also.

The boundaries of Galaad have not always been constant. At times we find the region lying between the Yarmok and the Jabboc designated by the name Galaad. Oftener, however, it is the region that extends from the Arnon in the south to Dan and Hermon in the north. Its western boundary has been always the same, for it is the river Jordan that separates it from the land of Canaan. The eastern limit is the desert, broken into by Ammon on the south and Hauran on the north. The distance from east to west is about thirty kilometres, whereas the length from either river in the extreme parts must be close on one hundred kilometres. It has been wisely remarked that one of the factors in the formation of character is the external appearances of the land wherein one is born and reared. This being admitted, there is scarcely a doubt that the upholders of the opinion that Thesbe of Galaad is the birthplace of Elias can bring forth very persuasive arguments for their proposition.

When one has studied for a time the history of the land of Galaad, one turns with greater interest to study the character of the Prophet of Israel. The inhabitants, whom we find there in the twilight of legend and history, are named " Giants "—" It was accounted a land of giants: and giants formerly dwelt in it. A people great and many and of tall stature." The part of Galaad north of the Jabboc was governed by Og, king of Bashan, of whom the author of Deuteronomy says—" for only Og, king of Bashan, remained of the race of

giants. His bed of iron is shewn, which is in Rabbath, of the children of Ammon, being nine cubits long, and four broad after the measure of the cubit of a man's hand." It was in this land that Jacob had wrestled successfully with the angel; after which contest he was named Israel. It was here also the Patriarch could exclaim—" I have seen God face to face and my soul has been saved." It was from the summit of the mountains of Galaad that Moses saw the vision of " the Land of Promise." It was amidst those strange and mysterious heights that the still more strange and mysterious obsequies of the great Law-Giver and Leader of the Hebrew people were performed by angel hands. The memories of Galaad were numerous and varied. Some recalled events ever dear to the child of Israel, other some spoke of bloodshed and horror. At the gate of the land of Canaan, it was sure to be a battle-ground whereon all the savagery of ancient warfare was practised to the limit. When Moses gave it to the tribes of Gad and Ruben and Manasses, as a reward of their warlike labors, many a sanguinary episode was yet to take place. Relapsing from time to time into the deplorable idolatry of the nations around, many a noble effort was to be made to throw off the yoke of those who compelled them to the worship of false gods. The sons of such a fatherland must needs be a strange mixture of the most divergent characteristics. A nature, tuned to the old traditions of Galaad, animated with its irresistible energy, confirmed in its enthusiasm and zeal, consecrated to its ideals of thoroughness, whether of good or evil, became of necessity a power in the world wherein it moved.

In the part beyond the Jordan at least eleven cities had been assigned to the Levites, and at least three or four cities of refuge—" And beyond the Jordan to the east of Jericho they appointed Bosor and Ramoth and

Gaulon" as cities of refuge. Consequently, it is not far-fetched to declare that Elias was a Levite, at least for those who hold the opinion that he was born in "Thesbe of the inhabitants of Galaad."

In making a comparison between Bashan and Galaad, one writer describes Galaad thus—"This is also a highland district, rather more varied than that further north, which rises to elevations of 4,000 feet above the sea. The plateau, which from a distance 'seems a boundless elevated plain and covered with forest,' is really furrowed by many glens which descend towards the Jordan and afford much beautiful scenery. The whole land, together with that of Moab further south, is naturally fertile, for while but few of the streams which descend to the Jordan from the west are perennial, all are so on the east." It is a fruitful country and could be called the granary of Arabia, notwithstanding its lofty hills and its bare mountains. Its scenery is, indeed, grand; but at the same time its rugged rocks and its bare yellow peaks may be termed "savage" and repellant to the eye. We cannot, then, find fault with one of the biographers of the Prophet who, treating precisely of his birth, tells us—"The soul of Elijah was tutored for his prophetic mission amid the rushing streams, 'the pipings of flocks,' the awful solitudes, and the rough free-booter life of the most distant territory of the sacred tribes." Compared with the Hebrews in the other parts of the then possessions of the chosen people, there is no doubt that the inhabitants were less cultured. Their mode of life was akin to the roving habits of the early patriarchs; and tent-life was rather common on the west side of the Jordan.

Thus it was amidst such surroundings, and in the atmosphere of such traditions, that Elias was born and lived his childhood. This is the more popular tradition and the one that appears fairly acceptable to us.

We must not conclude this chapter before we have referred to a theory which, no matter how far-fetched it may seem to others, has been offered by some biographers as a very likely solution of the question touching the place of birth of Elias.

According to these authorities, the Prophet of Israel was not a Priest, was not a Levite. No; he was not even one of the Nethinim, or helpers of the Levites. In fact, he was not in any sense a son of Israel. When the Carmelite Breviary mentions that "Elias was from the continent of Arabia" it touches upon this suggested origin. He was, as a matter of fact, a complete "outsider" and, just because of this, he was selected by the God of Israel to bring His message to the people who had begun to despise Him. Israel had fallen so far that there was no messenger to be found in it. The traitors to the old traditions were many and were everywhere. The faithful few were all in hiding—so spent was their spiritual life in the struggle with the wife of Achab. To accomplish the mission of the Lord it was, then, necessary to call a stranger to do the work of the Lord among His chosen people. It has been aptly stated thus—"Such a selection was purposely made by God to rebuke the wayward apostasy of His chosen Israel, and shew them that even from strangers and foreigners He could raise up honored men for the vindication of His truth and the accomplishment of His purposes."

It is not contrary to the facts of Holy Scripture to assert that God could, and would, use a stranger and a foreigner to announce some truth which he wished to communicate to the Faithful, or, perhaps it were better said, those who should have been faithful. The great Leader of the chosen people had been brought up in the court of Pharao. When the daughters of Raguel told of the help he had given them in their difficulties whilst watering their flocks, they spoke thus of him—"A man

of Egypt delivered us from the hands of the shepherds." But a still more instructive example occurs to us. Balsac, the king of Moab, had brought Balaam, the false prophet of the god Baal, to curse the hosts of Israel, but the Lord had decreed otherwise; hence, we read—" And when he Balaam was gone with speed, God met him. And the Lord put the word in his mouth." From the top of Phasga Balaam told Balsac—" I was brought to bless, the blessing I am not able to hinder." And from the mount of Phogor he gave utterance to the prophecy that has found a place even in the ritual of the Church. It seems as true in the Old Dispensation as it is in the New Dispensation, that, if men were to hold their peace when they should speak, the Truth would still be told—" If these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out."

There is the additional argument that men, who are strangers to the people to whom a message is to be delivered, are far more bent on their work, reckoning not of the conditions or of those facts that might make it more difficult to be frankly honest. The stranger coming on an errand is free from the weaknesses that are generally experienced by one who has to treat with friends or acquaintances. It is an historical fact that many of the leaders in the world's battles, martial, political and social, have not been children of the nations or the peoples that they led. However we may wish to explain it, the influence of such men has always been greater, apparently because of the fact that they did not belong to the common stock. Hence, whilst we refrain from accepting this opinion as to the origin of Elias, we do not see any inherent improbability in it.

Whatever be the real and true account of the birth of the Prophet, we must confess that it is not at all unlikely that the sacred Writer has intentionally given the meagre, and not too definite, information in regard

to him. No doubt, he gave all that he was possessed of at the time of writing—which was probably all that the people who had heard and seen Elias knew at the time when he first burst into view in the great drama of the people of God. Known only from his great zeal and his manner of life, the impression created by him must needs have been greater than if they had known who he was, and whence he came. His credentials were those that were bestowed upon him by the God of Israel who had sent him.

Many of the old commentators, and almost all of the monks and hermits who followed the example of Elias in the choice of a religious life, rejoice in the fact that so little is known of their Father and Founder. It is one of the many proofs that they adduce to show that their mode of life is very acceptable to the Lord, because he who came to introduce it into the world was most evidently another Melchisedeck, and the fruits of his life were to be its best credentials. There is no doubt that no parentage, however exalted, no fatherland, however famous, could take the place of the facts as narrated in the seventeenth chapter of the Third Book of Kings. Appearing like a lightning-flash, he rivetted all attention on the Godhead and the message of which he was the bearer.

CHAPTER V

THE PREPARATION FOR HIS MISSION

It seems, indeed, a very remote probability, nevertheless, it is not totally impossible, that one day we may be able to throw some light upon these very important questions that intrude themselves at the commencement of a biography of this wonderful Prophet of the Lord. Some fortunate traveller to the East, or some lucky book-worm in the dusty corner of some long-neglected library, may chance to lay his hands on the "Acts of the reign of King Amri." In that day, should it ever arrive, our knowledge of Elias the Prophet will be more complete.

In the sixteenth chapter of the Third Book of Kings it is written—"the rest of the acts of Amri and the battles he fought, are they not written in the book of the words of the days of the kings of Israel." The king here mentioned is none other than the father of Achab, to whom Elias was sent. Hence, it is not at all improbable that Elias had already appeared in the historical drama of the people of God. The father of Achab was just such as his son, for he had done evil in the sight of the Lord—"And Amri did evil in the sight of the Lord, and acted wickedly above all that were before him. And he walked in all the ways of Jeroboam, the son of Nabat, and in his sins wherewith he made Israel to sin: to provoke the Lord the God of Israel with their vanities." He who was stirred to action at the apostasy of the son would scarcely have kept silent in the presence of the ill-doing of the father, for which reason we may conclude that Elias had already

spoken to the wicked Amri. This, too, might give us the key to the sudden, unheralded appearance of Elias in the seventeenth chapter of the Third Book of Kings. The manner of his introduction in this latter chapter could then be very easily understood.

Unfortunately, there is no other record of this missing historical book. Hence, should it ever come to light, the difficulties that we may casually suggest in this chapter, just as we have in the last chapter, may find a convenient solution.

The solution of the question concerning the Prophet's preparation for the great mission very largely depends on the office he held when the Lord commissioned him to do His Will in regard to King Achab. Not by any means does the solution of the question depend entirely on the manner of man who threatened Achab, for according to our ideas the mission of the Prophet was not at all ended when his mission to Achab was already finished successfully. Apart from the undoubted aid given by the God of Israel, not only in the affair of Achab but in the subsequent undertakings of Elias, very different qualities were required for the announcing of the message to Achab and the work yet to be accomplished. Those of his biographers who have placed the public life of Elias in the four years, or thereabouts, that followed on his first interview with Achab are very far from the right concept of the life and mission of the man of God. No one could doubt for a moment of the extraordinary help given the Prophet in his contest with the king and his wife; neither could there be any doubt about the divine aid vouchsafed to him in his subsequent work. For the one, and for the other, very different natural qualities were demanded. Elias must have had in him the natural abilities and the acquired endowments that would be instruments for the God of Israel to use in the

accomplishing of the end He desired. We gladly accept the opinion that the Lord had from the very beginning called Elias to the work of his life-time.

In the preparation for his mission the Evangelists impress on us that John the Baptist, who was likened by our Lord to Elias, gave an example of penance and mortification before he entered on work. "And the same John had his garment of camels' hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins: and his meat was locusts and wild honey." Before he had exhorted others to the penitential life he took care to give them an example in his own life first. He had gone into the desert and, there, had learned the secret of his own weakness and the might of the power of Him whose Kingdom he was going to preach. Saint Luke tells us very clearly—"And the child grew and was strengthened in spirit and was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel." As we have already noted, John was purified in the womb of his mother; nevertheless, he considered that much had to be done on his own part, else he might be found unworthy of his great mission. Thus the desert was his cloister; and prayer and mortification were his contribution to the divine plan. It is not, then, an idle work to inquire as to the preparation of him who was his prototype and likeness.

If we write of Elias as a prophet, abstracting from any other title or office that he may have had, it is not easy to determine the time of his preparation or the manner of it. Isaias had reached the years of manhood ere he was moved to the high task of giving forth his evangelistic prophecies. A person of considerable influence from family connections and from personal worth, he was also married and had several children. He had, however, every opportunity to learn the lessons of life, and he came to his work with a well-stored mind. On the other hand, Jeremias seems to have been quite

young when he was called to do the Lord's Will in the interest of his country. According to the inspiration given him he was destined, even before his birth, to the sacred mission—" Before I formed thee in the bowels of thy mother, I knew thee : and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee : and made thee a prophet to the nations." But after this predilection the Lord still further fortified His messenger—" And the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth : and the Lord said to me : Behold I have given thee My words in thy mouth." This had seemed necessary because Jeremias had complained of his youth and his inability to perform such high office. Whilst Baruch seems to have been well versed in the law and the traditions before he began his work of prophecy, Amos was called from the seemingly menial task of cattle-driver to utter his lamentations and tell of his visions. But it may be argued that all these prophets were men who followed the times of Elias, and so their calling could throw no light on the preparation of the Prophet of Carmel.

A passing study of the manner in which the prophets prepared for their prophetic office before the time of Elias will not assist us very much in the inquiry we are now making. And in dealing with those who preceded him we must be on our guard that we do not confound the several meanings that have been attributed to the word " prophet," which meanings we, to-day, express by the use of different words.

Samuel has been called the first of the prophets; and of him we read—" And after she weaned him, she carried him with her. And she brought him to the house of the Lord in Silo. Now the child was as yet very young." Having made the offering of her boy to the Lord, Anna never took him thence; consequently, we read—" Now the child Samuel ministered to the Lord before Heli,"

and also—" Samuel slept in the temple of the Lord." The life of the young neophite was most exemplary, for it is told of him—" And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and not one of his words fell to the ground." If this were a preparation for the office of prophet, then, indeed, the calling must have been high and holy, and difficult to reach. There are, however, two matters to be remembered, namely, that Samuel was an offering to the Lord; and, secondly, that he was also intended for the Priesthood. If, on the other hand, we turn to the " call " of Saul to his place amongst the prophets, we have rather a poor idea of the preparation necessary for the task of "prophesying.' Samuel reveals to him certain signs by which he, Saul, might recognise that what he had done was authorised of God—" And after that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where the garrison of the Philistines is: and when thou shalt be come there into the city, thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place, with a psaltery and a timbrel and a pipe, and a harp before them, and they shall be prophesying. And the spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be changed into another man." But this sudden conversion, at least to the multitude, was something at which to marvel, for it is written—" And all that had known him yesterday and the day before, seeing that he was with the prophets, and prophesied, said to each other: What is this that has happened to the son of Cis? Is Saul also among the prophets?" Although the meaning of the word " prophesy " may be accepted in a signification that would not assist us in determining anything in reference to the true office of Elias, nevertheless, when we find Saul later on in his career exercising the calling of " prophet " we are certainly nearer to the manner of prophet Elias was—" And he went to Najoth, in

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Ramatha, and the spirit of the Lord came upon him also, and he went on and prophesied till he came to Najoth, in Ramatha."

It may, indeed, be argued that when the people marvelled to see Saul amongst the prophets, it is a sure sign that they expected some special preparation which they knew right well had not been exacted in the case of Saul; hence, their wonderment that one such as he should be found in the company of the prophets—and as one of their body.

It is evident that any judgment formed on what we can cull from the events that preceded, or followed, the times of Elias will not be very enlightening on the time, or the manner, of the preparation necessary to act worthily as the instrument of the Lord in the task of " prophesying."

If Elias were a Priest, as some of his biographers assume—and it is not at all unlikely—then the preparation for the Priesthood would of necessity entail a partial preparation for the office of prophet. It is distinctly asserted by some writers that he was of the tribe of Levi and, thus, was certain to be engaged in the work of the temple or sanctuaries, even though he may not have gone so far as Priesthood in the ministry of the people. Although Samuel, as we have already stated, was a Priest, as were also many others of the prophets—especially after the slaughter at Nob, and the dispersion of the Priests at Silo—nevertheless, the two offices were quite distinct. But we need not delay in discussing this aspect of the question, for it would not give us any extra light on the length of time and the manner of life obligatory on him who would do this important work of the Lord, namely, " prophesying."

The mission of Elias was not confined to the three years' drought in the reign of Achab. It extended to the years, and they seem to have been many, that saw the

founding and the first steps of the prophetic Institute. Samuel may have been the first, in time, of the prophets, but the first to make the life of the prophet a model for the years that were to come when Christ's Church was finding its place in the lives of men, was without doubt Elias. Samuel was a prophet—but one who was not destined to leave to the people of God spiritual successors to whom the Fathers of the Church could look as models, and of whom they were proud to say they were the spiritual sons.

It was one thing to deliver the message to Achab and to continue the battle for three years, but it was quite a different proposition to institute a religious community that was to last until the times of the Messias. It was one thing to hurl vengeance at the king and queen of Israel, but it was radically different to instil into the minds of men the principles of the hermit life, hallowed by its religious atmosphere. It was no easy matter to train men to a mode of life that was in direct contradiction to the ways of the worldly. It was not a question of keeping oneself in restraint for the period of one's natural life, it was the far more difficult one of instilling into the minds of young men those principles that should aid them to overcome all the temptations of life in an Eastern clime. The oriental nature was ever prompt to do a great work of short duration, to make a sudden ascent to the higher spiritual places, to undergo a great sacrifice, but the necessity of continuing the work or enduring the sacrifice until the very end—especially when the end was far-distant—required more than ordinary courage, more than ordinary powers of endurance.

The completed mission of Elias before he was to ascend to his terrestrial-celestial home was the establishment of the *filii prophetarum,* the sons of the prophets. The founding and the shaping of such a religious body could

be accomplished only by one who had experienced all the difficulties which such manner of life ordinarily encountered. It is in this way that we can easily estimate the time and the manner of the preparation of the great Prophet for the more important work delegated to him by the Lord.

When, then, we contemplate the lives of the great founders of religious Orders, when we bring to mind the spiritual heights to which many of their followers and disciples ascended, we can form some idea of the preparation that the Prophet of Carmel made. If we recall the manner of life and the years of probation of the great " Fathers of the Desert " before they were able to call Elias their " Father and Founder," some idea of his manner of life and his years of probation may be obtained. Amongst those who followed in the footsteps of Elias, there was none greater in life than he —of whom it has been declared—" there was not born of woman a greater "—and he was the Baptist who was likened by the Son of God to the " Father and Founder " of religious life. In the life, then, of the Baptist we may find the best answer to our question about the time and manner of Elias's preparation for the great work allotted him by God.

CHAPTER VI

ISRAEL, ITS KINGS AND ITS RELIGION

The origin of the Hebrew monarchy cannot be better told than in the words of the inspired Writer in the First Book of Kings—" And it came to pass when Samuel was old, that he appointed his sons to be judges over Israel," but " his sons walked not in his ways, but they turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment." Hence, it was that—" all the ancients of Israel being assembled, came to Samuel in Ramatha and they said to him: Behold thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways; make us a king to judge us, as all nations have." Samuel, according to the word of the Lord, remonstrated with the people and the ancients, but all in vain, so it is written—" And the Lord said to Samuel: Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to thee. For they have not rejected thee but Me that I should reign over them."

If we were to view this threat only in so far as it affected the temporal affairs of the future kingdom of Israel, its full meaning might be lost to us, for in the subsequent times the monarchy was on the whole somewhat of a benefit for Israel. Saul, David and Solomon did great things for Israel. Gauged by the governments in the countries around, the continuance of the Davidic line for more than five hundred years is an eloquent testimony to the temporal value of the monarchy. We cannot forget that, apart from their spiritual value, some of the princes were of high ability as rulers and as generals of their forces. On the other hand, if we consider their spiritual value to the people in a sincere

endeavour to attain to the inheritance bestowed on them by the Lord, we, at once, see the force and fulness of the threat made to Samuel and to the people. It is in this latter aspect of the kingly contribution to the ideals of the people that we proceed to view the monarchy of the chosen people.

The history of the kings of Israel is a disappointing narrative for those who expect to find in the records of their reigns something indicative of their lofty calling. From the time of their institution they were entitled "Jehovah's viceroys," but so few of them performed their duties to the people—in so far as the religion was concerned—that we can hardly believe they ever seriously thought of themselves in this light. Prophet after prophet thundered into their ears the Law and the traditions of the people of God. It seemed all in vain that they were at times deprived of their regal power by the men who were the real instruments of Jehovah—a perverse generation they remained to the very end.

The first king, Saul, was an acknowledged failure for one who was so equipped for the work of directing the people onwards to their spiritual destiny. Indeed, we cannot doubt that he was specially chosen of God for the exalted office. Nevertheless, he lived to be the outcast of heaven. Stripped of his kingly office, deprived of the divine favor, he was yet to feel that even his courage had forsaken him—"And Saul saw the army of the Philistines, and was afraid, and his heart was very much dismayed. And he consulted the Lord and He answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by priests, nor by prophets." Finally, this first king of Israel died by his own hand—"Then Saul took his sword, and fell upon it." David succeeded to the kingdom left by Saul, and although he seemed to have found special favor with God of Israel, yet he was not faithful, as a "viceroy" of the Lord should have been, for we read

that the prophet Nathan thus questioned the king of Israel—" Why therefore hast thou despised the word of the Lord, to do evil in my sight? Thou hast killed Urias the Hethite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon." And David could but answer to his guilt. Solomon, the son of David, succeeded to the patrimony of his father, and although called " the wisest of men," nevertheless, it is stated of him and his reign—" When he was old his heart was turned away by women to follow strange gods" ; and with greater emphasis it is added—"But Solomon worshipped Astarthe, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Moloch, the idol of the Ammonites." In the eleventh chapter of the Third Book of Kings there is quite a litany of the sins of this wise king of the people of Israel.

When Solomon died the kingdom was divided. Accepting the testimony of the records as we have them in the First and Second Books of Kings, there is one only conclusion, namely, that the legacy of evil to the northern kingdom was considerably greater than that which fell to the share of Juda. Indeed, one might say that in the northern part evil was the predominant factor in the lives of its kings, whereas in the lives of some of its rulers Juda could boast of some redeeming features. The student of this period of Hebrew history must acquiesce in the statement made by one of the historians of the Jewish people—" Of the northern kingdom all the kings, as judged by the standpoint of this book (*i.e.*, the Book of Kings), were bad, and in spite of the efforts of the prophets, and more especially of Elias, to stem the tide, the nation proceeds, as it were inevitably, to its downfall. The sister kingdom of Juda presents a more varied history : its annals show the reigns of several good kings, and religious reformations were not unknown. But on the whole the evil

triumphed over the good and Jerusalem fell like Samaria." To gauge fully this assertion, and to understand its true import, we must recall that, as a rule, the Hebrew chronicler does not write history for history's sake, but is ever mindful of the religious teaching of all events that befell the people of God.

No less than ten of the tribes of the chosen people rejected the rule of Roboam, the son of Solomon, the unwise, and yet tyrannical, successor of a wise but weak-willed monarch. "So Israel departed to their dwellings, but as for the children of Israel that dwelt in the cities of Juda, Roboam reigned over them." The ten tribes chose for their king Jeroboam—"When it came to pass that all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, they gathered an assembly, and sent and called him, and made him king over all Israel, and there was none that followed the house of David save the tribe of Juda only." Jeroboam had spent many years in Egypt, and from association with this people he had learned many of their vices. Lest there should be any fraternising with the tribe of Juda owing to the temple in Jerusalem being the centre of religious worship, Jeroboam declared that Bethel and Dan should, henceforth, be to the ten tribes what Jerusalem once was to all Israel, and so had recourse to a very dangerous innovation which was sure to bring evil to the people—"Lest the heart of this people should return to their lord Roboam, the king of Juda: and they will kill me and return to him. And finding out a device he made two golden calves, and he said to them: Go ye up no more to Jerusalem: Behold thy gods, O Israel, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt. And he set one in Bethel and the other in Dan. And this thing became an occasion of sin; for the people went to adore as far as Dan. And he made temples in the high places and priests of the lowest of the people, who were not of the sons of Levi." What-

ever defence the partisans of this king can offer for his strange conduct, it cannot ever be denied that he had opened a door to every abuse that could attend the worship of the God of Israel. It was merely a question of time until this innovation should of necessity produce the most terrible results. Not content with this beginning of setting before the minds of the people symbols of pagan worship, he did not hesitate, we are told, to offer incense on the altars of these strange gods. In this manner did Jeroboam satisfy his ambition to rule over Israel. In accomplishing his end, in obtaining temporal power, he sacrificed the best interests of the religion of the people of God. No wonder that by the mouth of Ahias, the prophet, his doom should be pronounced—"Go and tell Jeroboam: Thou hast done evil above all that were before thee, and hast made thee strange gods and molten gods, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back. Therefore, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam. Them that shall die of Jeroboam in the city, the dogs shall eat: and them that shall die in the field, the birds of the air shall devour: for the Lord hath spoken it."

Of the successor of Jeroboam it is briefly recorded—"But Nadab the son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel the second year of Asa king of Juda. And he reigned over Israel two years. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the ways of his father, and in his sins, wherewith he made Israel to sin." His reign over Israel was brief, indeed, and his end was, as his life, miserable—"So Baasa slew him in the third year. And he cut off all the house of Jeroboam; he left not so much as one soul of his seed."

Baasa, the slayer of the house of Jeroboam, reigned over Israel for more than four and twenty years. He also was denounced by the prophet Jehu because he had made the people of the Lord to sin, "and had

provoked the God of Israel." His was the well-merited fate of the house of Jeroboam—" Behold," said the prophet, " I will cut down the posterity of Baasa and the posterity of his house, and I will make thy house as the house of Jeroboam the son of Nabat." This temporal ruin was in revenge for the spiritual evil he had done the people of God.

The son and successor of this Baasa was just as his father, and a similar fate awaited him. When he saw how truly the words of the prophet were realised in the death of his father he put the messenger of the Lord to death—" For this cause he slew him, that is to say, Jehu the son of Hannani, the prophet." The unerring Hand of the Lord, however, accomplished all that had been foretold by the mouth of the prophet—" Now Ela was drinking in Thersa, and drunk in the house of Arsa the governor of Thersa. And Zambri rushing in struck him and slew him in the seven and twentieth year of Asa."

Thus it was that Zambri " destroyed all the house of Baasa," for " all the sins of Baasa, and the sins of Ela his son, who sinned, and made Israel to sin, provoking the Lord the God of Israel with their vanities."

Zambri did not live long to enjoy the fruits of his triumph over the son of Baasa, for it is written—" Now the army was besieging Gebbethon a city of the Philistines. And when they heard that Zambri had rebelled and had slain the king, all Israel made Amri their king, who was general over Israel in the camp that day. And Amri went up and besieged Thersa. And Zambri seeing that the city was about to be taken went into the palace and burnt himself with the king's house : and he died."

Then came to the throne of Israel the father of that Achab with whom the beginning of the mission of Elias, the Thesbite, is associated. His competitor for the throne was the son of Gineth, but he died soon after

the struggle between himself and Thebni had begun. No historian can doubt of the vast temporal strides that were made by Israel in the reign of Amri, for it was he who bought the site for Samaria, and who also fortified it and made it a place of strength as well as of beauty. Nevertheless, we find the comments of the inspired Writer to be no more encouraging than those that had been already made in regard to the reigns of his predecessors—" And Amri did evil in the sight of the Lord, and acted wickedly above all that were before him. And he walked in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nabat, and in sins wherewith he made Israel to sin : to provoke the Lord the God of Israel to anger with their vanities."

This passing glance at the spiritual contribution of the predecessors of Achab to the welfare of the religion of the chosen people will serve to give the reader an idea of the mission that was consigned to Elias, the Prophet.

There were, however, other malign influences at work to tear from the hearts of the people of Israel the religion gifted them by their God; and we may be excused if, for a moment, we refer to them in a brief and passing manner.

The continual intercourse with the outside nations—at times a matter of economic necessity, at times a protection against the powers envious of their independance, greedy for the spoils of war, and bent on their subjugation—gave an open door to these influences that are apt to be inimical to a religion that demanded such observance and such fidelity to an unseen Deity. Attacks of this kind, coming in a thousand different forms, made the moral and religious life of the people a subject of constant anxiety to the men who have been called, with more than mere superficial admiration, the " watch-dogs of Israel."

Israel lay between the two oldest civilisations, and was in a real sense " the great divide " between the

valley of the Nile and the valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates. Through the land of Israel must pass the merchant or the warrior who would ply his trade at the expense of either Egypt, or Babylonia, or Assyria. In the early years of their arrival in the land of Canaan, the Hebrews lived a life apart from their surrounding neighbors. Their method of life tended to keep them within their own surroundings, and they had little cause for intercourse with those who came not to their regions; in fact, their strength was in their isolation, and this isolation was a great safeguard to their peculiar religious beliefs.

Then came the days of Solomon, who was more truly a merchant than a warrior. Peace had for him more attractions than had war; nevertheless, he wisely paid attention to the places that might be the cause of any weakness to his kingdom, such as Gezer and Megiddon. His alliance with the house of Pharao was certainly not in the religious interests of Israel, even though it marked the progress of the Hebrew nation to its status amongst the greater powers of the world. The men of Israel began to make long voyages, and thus it was that they brought back the new notions that were sure to influence the lives of the people. The court of Solomon was more like the court of a pagan monarch than the residence of one who was a "viceroy" of the Lord. Temples to strange gods began to be seen in the chief places of Israel. Jeroboam had been so long in the land of Egypt that he was sure to bring back some token of its paganism. So was it with several of his successors. With the widening of its interests Israel found it more difficult to keep the fountains of their religious spirit free from the effects of foreign idolatry. It has been asserted, and we believe with very much reason, that the Golden Calves of Jeroboam were intended to be a representation of the God of Israel; none the less,

the innovation was a serious matter for the religion of the children of Israel. When serious abuses are practised in a community, it cannot be truthfully maintained that they have come in as recognised abuses, but the results are the same—the injury is done.

The surrender of the cities to Hiram, king of Tyre, was not likely to be without its effect on the life of the Israelites who still continued to live in those places. The cities bestowed on the kings of Israel owing to their matrimonial alliances were apt to become a menace to the purity of the worship of the one true God. In another place we shall write of the evil influence exercised by the queens, and the queen-mothers, who had come to share in the government of the kingdom.

During those years the religion of Israel was assaulted on every side. The people saw their enemies free from the restraints that their religion demanded, untrammelled by their rigorous ritual, uncircumscribed by their law and their traditions; yet these same enemies were, from the point of view of the world, successful in the pursuits of war and peace—far more so than the people of Israel. No wonder that there should ever be a hungering for " the flesh-pots of Egypt," when the eating from them seemed more conducive to success than to failure.

Need we wonder, then, that the heart of the valiant warrior-Prophet of Israel should grow faint in the presence of all these—and numerous other—obstacles to the practice of the religion of the God of Israel. The attentive reader of the Books of the Kings will pity from his heart the weeping Prophet when from his soul's inmost depths he exclaimed—" The children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant; they have overthrown Thy altars, they have slain Thy prophets with the sword, and I alone am left, and they seek my life to take it away."

CHAPTER VII

THE MESSAGE DELIVERED AT SAMARIA

We have briefly reviewed the causes at work for the undermining of the religion in the hearts of the chosen people. It is now our duty to point out the lamentable conditions of affairs when the God of Israel had determined to teach His people a lesson. Many a time He had spoken to His chosen children, and for that purpose He had sent prophets and messengers directly to them: but now He sends His Prophet to their king, although His just anger is against both king and people. The real criminal was, however, Achab, the son of Amri of evil fame.

Let us here recall that we are treating of the history of a people to whom the Lord had gifted a special knowledge of Himself. These people were not only to be a testimony to the divine Truth revealed to them, they were also to be teachers of that Truth to all nations around. From these people was to come the Messias, whose history, at least in an obscure manner, was known to them. As a nation, then, they were to prepare themselves to be the precursors of a spiritual kingdom on earth which should last until the end of all time. Not to all of them did these facts appear with equal force and equal clearness, for as yet the time had not come for this clear understanding of such far-reaching truths. Nevertheless, the enlightened amongst them had seized upon a clear, though limited, idea of the characteristics of the one true God, and were well aware of their own duty and, also, of the hope that was in the heart of the nation in regard to the future. Men spiritually con-

stituted, as was Elias, could see all these things with a clearness and a vividness far beyond the vision of the common children of the people.

There was nothing so very new in the message that Elias had been commissioned to deliver to Achab. The punishment, or sanction, was of a species that had been often experienced, though not perhaps to the same extent, nor for the same length of time. It was really the terrible aftermath of the drought that has attracted the attention of men. The defection of the royal household from the traditions and the Law of Israel was followed by the infidelity of the people to the religious ideals of the nation. It was agonising to the ardent soul of Elias to behold the chosen people, whose vocation was so high and so sublime, bowing down before the idols of a strange faith. It was the worst of tortures to see before his eyes a people who had renounced their birthright for the material success, or rather for the hope of it, which other nations, not called as they were, had enjoyed. In a word, it was the old, old, story being rehearsed in the homes of Israel; it was the old, old, drama being played on the hill-tops and enacted in the cities of Israel. Men were measuring the inconveniences of the spiritual life with the success attained by those who callously, and at all costs, sought the things of the world. Close by them were cities, such as Tyre and Sidon, blessed, as far as ordinary mortals could judge, with all the gifts of nature, notwithstanding their false gods and their lives of laxity and sin. The burden of observances laid on the shoulders of the people of God did not seem to lighten the weight of their other infirmities, nor did it make more tolerable the galling daily pressure of the Law and the traditions. Men grew weary at the continual restraint and turned longing eyes to that other life that gave present enjoyment and promised no future pain. To see the seal of cowardice

on the brow of the nation; to know that treachery was in the hearts of those so loved by God, made the soul of the Prophet burn with a fierce and angry fire. What must have been the sorrow and the pain of the God of Israel to know that He was being betrayed by those whom He had specially chosen, to whom He had pledged His love before the face of the nations of the earth! He was publicly outraged and flagrantly despised by the men who should be in reality what they were being called, "viceroys of the Lord." All day long had He held out His hands inviting them, but they would not; and because of His seemingly foolish Love He was mocked at by men. A stiff-necked people they were, indeed, whose hearts and minds had gone after the fleeting things of the world and had forgotten Him; nay, had rejected Him, their Lord and their God, Who had brought them from the land of bondage and delivered them so often from the hands of their enemies.

Such was the kingdom of Israel when Elias came to Samaria; such was the man who ruled the destinies of the people in those days; such were the chosen children of Israel when Elias came to speak his message in the capital of Achab.

The famous interview between Elias, the Prophet of Carmel, and the king of Israel, Achab, took place, in all probability, in the city of Samaria and at the palace where dwelt the king and Jezabel, the daughter of the king of Sidon, his wife, who seems to have been absent at the time.

This famous city had been built by Amri, the father of King Achab, and, owing to its splendid geographical, as well as strategical, position, had rapidly developed into a place of great importance, not only to the royal family, but to the whole kingdom of Israel. It has been well described, as to its position, in one of the geographical accounts of Palestine, in the following

words—" The hill of Samaria is an oblong mountain of considerable elevation and very regular in form, situated in the midst of a broad, deep valley, the continuation of that Shechem, which here expands to five or six miles. Beyond this valley, which completely isolates the hill, the mountains arise on every side, forming a complete wall around the city. They are terraced to the tops, sown in grain, and planted with olives and figs. The hill of Samaria itself is cultivated from its base, the terraced sides and the summits being covered with corn and with olive-trees. The ascent of the hill is very steep." From this somewhat modern description we can form a fair idea of the beauty, as well as the utility, of the place selected by Amri when, nearly a thousand years before Christ, " he bought the hill of Samaria of Semer for two talents of silver. And he built upon it and he called the city which he built Samaria after the name of Semer, the owner of the hill." Situated as it is, 1,354 feet above the level of the sea, and almost 330 feet above the encircling hills, it is easy to conceive how pleasant it should be as a place of residence and how effective its position as a city of defence.

The city shared in the busy life and the commerce that passed along the highway betyeen Syria, Arabia and Egypt and the regions that were in the neighborhood of these northern and southern countries. One of the recognised ways of communication between the river Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea passed by the walls of this city. Hence, we need not wonder that the king of Syria insisted that Amri should set apart certain streets for the residence of his subjects who desired to trade with the people of the city and with the merchants who passed to and fro between the north and the south. Doubtless, the city contained men from many climes bent on vending their wares to the citizens as well as to

the passing travellers. In the reign of Achab, and precisely at the time that Elias paid the above-mentioned visit to the king, the city must have been in the very heyday of its prosperity.

From the varied products of Tyre and of Sidon, from the commercial exports and imports of Egypt and the regions above the Euphrates, we can form a fair estimate of the nature and extent of the business that was carried on in Samaria. As to the neighborhood of the great highway, it could only be called a country "flowing with milk and honey," when the reference is intended for the goats that throng its mountains, or rather hills, and the bees that even to-day are remarkable for their honey-producing qualities. Nevertheless, in those earlier years when the Hebrew population in the district of which Samaria was the capital had not lost their energy, or had not yet become the victim of the indolent habits that were too often found in their enervating climate, crops of grain, plantations of olives, and stretches of vineyards, were seen on every side. Abundant supplies of wine and oil from this neighborhood were regularly conveyed on the way to Egypt and the adjacent regions, and, hence, quite a brisk commerce was the result. We read of the wonderful riches of the land in minerals and metals, yet it cannot be questioned that in Samaria there were very few artificers who were really Israelites; but the capital could not be without vendors of wares so commonly necessary.

Five or six miles south-east of Samaria is Shechem, for a time the capital of the northern kingdom. It lay in the valley that formed a natural highway through the Palestine uplands from the lands east of the Jordan. It was a place noted in Hebrew history, but not at all suited for a capital which of necessity, from time to time, required defence. Amri, the father of Achab, had seen the weakness of his kingdom in that place which

should be strongest; consequently, with the knowledge of a true warrior, he chose Samaria, some distance to the north-west. And his choice has been praised by those of his own time. Samaria remained the capital of the kingdom from the days of Amri until the Captivity. Naturally, it saw many dark days and experienced from time to time many and varied vicissitudes. It had justly succeeded to the glory of the ruined Thersa.

Amri had spared no expense in the building of a capital worthy of his nation. His natural ambition was to try and found a rival to Jerusalem. His son Achab contributed no small amount to the establishing and the beautifying of the place selected by his warrior-father. According to the custom of the times, his palace was at once a royal residence and a fortress. It had the unique distinction of being encased in ivory, and has been called " the ivory house " of Achab. The very presence of such a dwelling jarred on the simple taste of the Prophet, who saw in it the triumph of the Phœnician workmen who came from the city of Tyre, and who had helped by their presence to corrupt the people of the Lord. Such palaces were built regardless of cost. Its accommodation must have been ample and spacious, for it could, in addition to housing the ordinary retinue of an oriental monarch, supply lodging for at least four hundred and fifty, or perhaps twice that number, of prophets of the false gods, who regularly " ate at the royal table."

It was probably in this very palace that Elias delivered his message to the king. Surrounded by his body-guard and in the midst of his friends, on every side of him tokens of greatness and signs of power and majesty, here it was that Achab was to hear the decree of the God of Israel Whom he had not only neglected but had betrayed at the bidding of his royal consort.

No other place could possibly be so suitable background for the message of the Prophet. Indeed, the contrast between the surroundings and the possibility of what should follow from the threat was the best lesson that Israel could have. The edifice set in ivory; the bands of armed men; the decorations and the treasures of the palace; the rich and costly garments of the king and his followers; the insolence of the priests of Baal; the cowardly souls of those Israelites who had provoked the God of Israel—to pronounce a sentence of condemnation on all these was the office of him alone who was the child of heaven. Nothing could have saved the messenger of wrath to that multitude and to those surroundings except the power and the influence of the God of Israel.

On his way to the palace of the king, Elias had travelled through the busy streets of the new city. On either side of him, as he walked, there were well-stocked bazaars, which contained wares from every part of the world then known to the Easterns. Already the taste for sumptuous edifices had begun to show itself, and this was the more evident in the places set apart for the foreign element, who had already obtained the right to live and trade in the midst of the sons of Israel. The Syrian vied with the Tyrian in showing off the resources of his country. Samaria was, unlike the cities wherein space was of the utmost concern, studded with one-storied and two-storied houses; hence, the extent of its riches and the numbers of its people made a greater and more imposing impression on the visitor. Samaria was a kind of open and defiant declaration of the success of the line of Amri; and most of all did it indicate the strength and the power of the then king, Achab. It must have seemed to any other human eye but that of the inspired Prophet that to foretell suffering, distress and want for this city, within the next few years, was a

veritable beating of the wind—" the voice of one crying in the wilderness."

As to its population, nothing can with strict accuracy be known to-day. The method of estimating the population of a nation, or a city, or an army, or, indeed, of any body of men and women, was then strictly oriental. If it were a question of showing the resources of a kingdom, or a city, much depended on whether praise were intended or disrespect insinuated. If the deeds of a warrior were being related, or the pomp of a king described, then a most generous effort of the imagination was called into play. If it were the number of captives, following in the train of a conqueror, or the number of cities destroyed by a successful general, not so much was accuracy demanded as homage was to be paid—in the numeration. A rough estimate of the population might be aimed at, were we to refer to an historical item of fairly certain authenticity. Sargon the king of Assyria (about 740 B.C.), took the city of Samaria after a siege of two years—the siege had been begun by his predecessor. The number of those whom he led forth as prisoners was 27,290. How many he allowed to remain in the captured city, we do not know; but it must have been a goodly number, indeed, for he tells us he brought his lieutenants to be governors there—" I besieged and occupied the town of Samaria and took 27,290 of its inhabitants captive. I took from them fifty chariots, but left the rest of their belongings. I placed over them my lieutenants." These prisoners of war would appear to have been of the most important of the residents. A few years afterwards we find the city strong enough to rebel against its Assyrian overlords; hence, the loss of nearly 30,000 did not seem to destroy the spirit of the people. From this we may conclude that the population of Samaria was, then, what the population of our very opulent cities would be to-day.

In all that mass of people who lived and worked in Samaria, the Prophet could count on no friend, as he walked its streets to the encounter with the powerful king. Undoubtedly, there were many secret friends of the same God Whom Elias worshipped, but they were all in hiding, and depending on the charity of those who had not drawn the attention of the false prophets to their faith by the open practice of it. Elias was just as much alone in that great, big, bad city as he was destined to be in his cell by the Jordan or in his rocky home on the side of Horeb. Well might he say to himself, as he afterwards said to the Lord—" I alone am left."

For the reasons already given, we have taken the palace as the place wherein Elias announced the message from the God of Israel, but we do not reject as improbable the scene depicted in one of the pictures still to be found in some of the ancient Carmelite Houses. Indeed, the discoveries of the American expedition sent out by the University of Harvard, in 1908, have shown us that close by the palace of the king there was a well-equipped and richly-endowed temple to Baal, and thus that scene painted by some old monkish hand has gained a kind of confirmation that in earlier years did not seem so probable. The artist has placed the scene of the Prophet's address to the king in the temple, and at the moment when Achab has been guilty of the terrible and ignominious treachery of offering sacrifice to the god Baal. That the Prophet of the Lord should come upon the " viceroy of Jehovah " in the act of making his recantation of the God of Israel, and likewise his act of homage to the idol of a false god, adds considerably to the scene, already tremendously dramatic, described in the seventeenth chapter of the Third Book of Kings. The stately temple of Baal being situated almost in the same grounds as the palace, it is

not so unlikely that Achab was carrying out the morning, or the evening, sacrifice as was the custom. In weak characters of the type of the king it is not unusual to find a kind of compromise by which he would share honors between the God of Israel and the god of his wife, namely, Baal.

In whichever place it was that the message was delivered, the surrounding circumstances must have been worthy of the chief instrument chosen by the God of Israel. Elias, whose character we know and whose power and might are apparent at every step of his career, was from a mere human point of view the noblest and the most effective instrument that the Lord could select to thunder into the ears of Achab—"As the Lord liveth, the God of Israel, in Whose sight I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to the words of my mouth." This message must have come to Achab where he was in the enjoyment of all that the world could give him in the way of honor and glory. The desolation that was to come must have been, in the mental gaze of all, as great a contrast with the then state of the king and his nation as the contrast was between Elias the Prophet and the powerful son of Amri. In the presence of such power and glory and riches and arrogance no timorous soul, no man unaware of a divine assistance, would have dared to open his lips in denunciation in this place, in the midst of such seeming blessings of nature and of the gods. What burning faith must have animated the soul of Elias to launch into the king's ears the message of Yahveh when everything around seemed to give the lie to his words!

The sublimity of the scene, nay, rather the awful terror of it, seems to have dawned on the Sacred Writer of the Book of Kings, and so he passes it over as if it were a theme to which even his inspired pen

could not do justice. As we study the history of those days in Israel, as we reflect on the mission of the people of God, as we penetrate into the character of the great Prophet, we feel pleased that the Sacred Chronicler has left so much to our imagination and to our individual thinking.

The fervent student reads again and again that powerful if seemingly brief passage, and the longer he meditates on it the more it comes home to him that no nobler introduction could ever have been conceived to the opening scene of the mission of the Prophet of Carmel than—"And Elias the Thesbite of the inhabitants of Galaad said to Achab: As the Lord liveth, the God of Israel, in whose sight I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to the words of my mouth." In a moment he forgets the might of the king, the astuteness of Jezabel, the grandeur of the pagan temples, the prophets of the false gods, the richness of the city, the busy life of the people, the mighty warriors of Israel, the ivory palace of the king, and the impregnable walls of the city; for, he well knows that in one—and in all—there is nothing that can gainsay the word of the Prophet nor resist the summons to surrender and humiliation.

Not a few commentators have advanced the opinion that this was not the first occasion on which the king and Elias had met to discuss matters of supreme importance; and some others add that this opening scene is only the peroration of an address given by the Prophet to the king; in other words, we have only the sentence delivered by the Prophet, but that there had preceded quite a long harangue in which had been explained the depth of the iniquity of king and people and the long-suffering of Yahveh. All these comments may be quite true, but for the diligent student they have little interest; he is content with the force, and the

grandeur, and the awfulness of the scene. It was almost as a sentence of death pronounced, in words that burn, upon a nation and a people chosen from amongst all others and dearly-loved by Him Who had sent the Prophet of Carmel. It was at once a castigation and a grace; it was a declaration of divine anger, and at the same time an act of infinite mercy. It is, thus, that Ecclesiasticus recalls the scene—" And Elias the Prophet stood up, as a fire : and his words burnt like a torch. He brought a famine upon them : and they that provoked him in their envy, were reduced to a small number." And later the same Sacred Writer adds—" Blessed are they that saw thee and were honored with thy friendship "—for, indeed, Elias was terrible only to those who had deafened their ears to the divine call and hardened their hearts to divine grace. It was not the words of Elias that had begotten the terrible denunciation, it was the repeated betrayals on the part of Achab and his people.

CHAPTER VIII

SAMARIA UNDER PUNISHMENT

The sentence pronounced against Israel was—" There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to the words of my mouth." The words that precede the sentence have been construed by some commentators as an oath—" As the Lord liveth, the God of Israel, in Whose sight I stand." It does not appear to be in keeping with the nature of the mission of the Prophet that he should affirm his message on oath, although the words undoubtedly point to the mighty sanction that was attached to the pronouncement. Nay, rather there is, implicitly at least, a declaration of war between the gods of Achab and Jezabel and the God of Israel. A trial of strength is going to take place, because it had come to pass that Israel looked for its prosperity to the gods of Tyre and Sidon. Assuredly, the people had begun to look to Baal and to Astarthe when there was a question of their material prosperity, and especially was this true when the fate of their harvests, the welfare of their herds, and the influence of the weather were in question. Instead of betaking themselves to the God of Israel, they had recourse to the temples of Baal and to the Groves of Astarthe. Hence, in this declaration of war against the betrayal of the people by the king, Elias puts the real issue in the forefront. Men of his ardent nature abhor compromise, and he, like all messengers called of God, was filled with his mission, and so, in the declaring of it, he left nothing in doubt—either as to the message, or as to the One Who was the

sender. He took issue with the king on the very matter that most appealed to the interests of the people—" whether the author of the blessings of nature so much desired by the people was the God of Israel or the gods of Jezabel?"

The sentence, terrible as it was in itself, had, however, one element of hope, namely, that there was no declared definite limit to its duration; from which it may be argued that all should depend on the manner in which the king and the people took their castigation. Hence, if the king had shown, at any time during the three years of the drought, a change of heart, the God of Israel would have had pity on His people, as oftentimes He had before, and at once the Prophet should have spoken. The fact that the dire visitation lasted for three years and a half was due to the weakness of the king in his relations with his royal consort, to whom he appears to have been utterly subject, and who seemed to be more obdurate as the effects of the drought became more apparent.

The people of Israel had often, without doubt, experienced such droughts before the time of the Prophet, but they were more or less natural phenomena which are incidental to almost every region of the East; and, no matter how frequently severe the results, they were of a passing nature. The present drought could not be counted amongst those natural phenomena, because it was specially decreed by the man of God; moreover, it was at his wish that it was continued so long. It was a visitation according to the Will of the God of Israel, and so should not pass until that Divine Will had accepted the desired result. For the ordinary droughts that afflict a country there can always be some preparation and, even when it is of a prolonged nature, there is always some means of relieving the direful consequences; but in this particular struggle between

the false gods and the God of Israel the mitigating elements should either be removed, or exhausted, else the punishment should fail in its mission.

A rapid glance at the regions to be afflicted, and the nature of the surrounding country, will help us to realise the nature of this visitation, so seldom exercised by the direct intervention of, and for the publicly expressed purpose of showing, the Almighty power in its struggle with the fantastic creations of the human heart and intellect.

Professor Sayce gives us a description of the land of Samaria and the regions of which it was the centre—"Shut in between the Desert of Arabia and the Mediterranean Sea on the east and on the west, it is a narrow strip of territory, for the most part mountainous, rugged, and barren. Granite and gneiss, overlaid with hard sandstone and masses of secondary limestones, form, as it were, the skeleton of the country. Here and there, at Carmel and Gerizim, patches of the tertiary nummulite of Egypt make their appearances, and in the plain of Megiddo and the coast, as well as in the 'Ghor,' or in the valley of the Jordan, there is a rich alluvial soil. But elsewhere all is barren, or nearly so, cultivation being possible only by terracing the cliffs, and bringing the soil up to them from the plains below with slow and painful labor. It has often been said that Palestine was more widely cultivated in ancient times than it is to-day. But if so, this was only because a larger area of the cultivable ground was tilled. The plains of the coast, which are now given over to malaria and to Bedouin thieves, were, doubtless, thickly populated and well sown. But the ground actually fit for cultivation there could not have been a larger amount than there is at present." From this passing description of the country it is evident how dependent it is upon a copious rainfall, especially those parts that

are made cultivable by the transference of the soil from the alluvial parts.

Not less interesting is the description given by Josephus of Samaria itself—" It is entirely of the same nature as Judea, for both countries are made up of hills and valleys, are moist enough for agriculture, and are very fertile. They are naturally watered by many streams, but derive their chief moisture from the rain-water, preserved in reservoirs during the dry season, of which they have no want; and as for the streams that they have, their waters are exceeding sweet. By reason of the excellent grass that they have, their cattle yield more milk than those of any other places; and what is the greatest sign of excellence and abundance, they each of them are full of people." From this it is evident that a failure of the crops in Samaria would be a detriment not only to the country itself, but should react on the surrounding regions; and from the nature of the country surrounding, at least that in the immediate vicinity, no help could be expected in case of a failure of the agricultural products of Samaria. The conservation of the rain-water was essential to the well-being of the agricultural products of the region. The lands along the banks of the Jordan could not feel so much the ordinary droughts that came periodically to Palestine, but in the drought brought to pass by the words of Elias, even those parts suffered very severely—as we can gather from the sacred narrative. Whilst Samaria and the near regions seemed to be a kind of granary for the country, and above all for the great towns and cities, it is evident that with a prolonged drought, not only the resources of the country should fail, but the effects would react on the capital city and its surrounding country, making them particularly participators in the general misery.

Nature treats with a motherly hand each portion of the earth, and to no part is she more kindly disposed

than to the rugged, arid and mountainous regions of Palestine. The "earlier and the later rains" are accountable for the very fruitful soil to be found in those climes. The picture of a happy land is presented by Isaias under the type of a well-watered region—"Thou hast visited the earth and hast plentifully watered it; Thou hast many ways enriched it. The river of God is filled with water: Thou hast prepared their food; for so is its preparation. Fill up plentifully the streams thereof; multiply its fruits. It shall spring up and rejoice in its showers." The chosen people were well aware of what constituted their success. When Caleb was giving a dowry to his daughter, he allotted to her a field, but she asked—"Give me a blessing, for thou hast given me dry land; give me also a watery land. So Caleb gave her the upper and the nether watery ground." When the dews came, and the vernal and the autumnal rains were not withheld, we can then realise somewhat of the scene depicted by the Writer of the Canticles—"The flowers have appeared in our land: the time of pruning has come: the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. The fig-tree has put forth her green figs: the vines in flower yield their sweet smell." Given all the bounties that nature could, and would, give to this land, it would not require any stretch of the imagination to say of these regions at least—"a land flowing with milk and honey."

Without the dews and the rains the vast region was a scene of desolation and despair. Of one of the ordinary droughts that afflicted from time to time, we may recall the words of Jeremias—"The words of the Lord that came to Jeremias, concerning the words of the drought. Judea hath mourned, and the gates thereof are fallen and are become obscure on the ground, and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up. The great ones sent their inferiors to the water: they came to draw, they found no water, they carried back their vessels empty:

they were confounded and afflicted and covered their heads. For the destruction of the land because there came no rain upon the earth, the husbandmen were confounded : they covered their heads. Yea, the hind also brought forth in the field and left it because there was no grass."

We have made special mention of the dews because Elias had declared in the punishment meted out to the erring king and obstinate people that no dews should fall on the land. When at times the rains, either " the later or the former," were wanting in their courses, there were always the dews that fell abundantly at night, and these hardly ever failed; and, above all, in the very warm months they descended in greater quantity. If we glance at a passage from Genesis, wherein Jacob upbraids his father-in-law Laban for his hasty pursuit of him, we shall find stated one of the reasons of this copious fall of dews nightly in the land of the chosen people. Jacob tells his father-in-law—" Day and night was I parched with heat and with frost; and sleep departed from my eyes." We have here a statement of facts—the day and the night in these climates are directly opposed to each other; the day is excessively warm and the night is intensely cold. From these alterations of temperature, coming so soon the one on the other, there is a very copious fall of dew, or moisture, as soon as the vertical sun ceases to play on the earth. The hotter the day the greater the change, and, hence, the more abundant fall of the moisture in the atmosphere well-laden with water that will in due course sink into the hot and parched soil. So great is the fall of moisture, and so constant is it, that those who are exposed to the night air are covered with this dew, or moisture, and it not infrequently happens that such persons are wetted to the skin. It is not necessary to dwell on the effects of this fall of dew, or moisture, on

the land that has been parched during the day. Neither is it necessary to advert to the refreshing and the invigorating effects that such moisture can give to the crops and the soil itself, notwithstanding all the heats of the day and the scorching of the winds that at times are as deadly to the life of man as they are to the vegetable and the animal life. No wonder that we find the rain and the dew as complements in the minds of some of the Sacred Writers, as, for example, in Osee—"His going forth is prepared as the morning light and he will come to us as the 'early and the later rain' to the earth. What shall I do to thee O Ephraim? What shall I do to thee O Juda? Your mercy is as a morning cloud and as the dew that goeth away in the morning." The chastisement declared for the erring king and his obstinate people was, then, complete in its kind, for the drought without either dew or rain was, indeed, a complete drought, and one that should strike terror into the hearts of even the most hardened sinners and most audacious idolators.

We have no precise indication of the time when the message of the Prophet was delivered to the king, but from the words that follow in the seventeenth chapter, namely—"Get thee hence, and go towards the east, and hide thyself by the torrent of Carith, which is over against the Jordan"—we might conclude that it was immediately before the harvest rains, which were so necessary for a plentiful crop. The failure of the crop, just when the people were preparing for the gathering of it, would be an immediate and a sufficient sign to the king and to the people that the battle between the God of Israel and the gods of Jezabel had then seriously begun. That the drought had immediately set in, we cannot doubt, for the Prophet is ordered to the place where the supply of water shall last longest. We may, with equal certainty, say that the people and the king

had begun at once to feel the effects of the malediction pronounced by the Prophet, and the more certain, and the more immediate, way to bring home to them the fact that punishment was really intended was to withhold the harvest rains. Languishing in the fields and unable to attain to maturity, and, mayhap, visited by those winds that blasted by their cold and frosty breezes everything that they touched in the vegetable world, those crops should be an awful reminder of the reality of the chastisement pronounced by the God of Israel through the mouth of His Prophet, Elias.

In the earlier years there was an intensive cultivation of the regions between the Jordan and the Mediterranean, but this, in turn, required the assistance of many animals whose maintenance came from the ground. Consequently, anything that affected the crops was sure to affect the life of the animals. The prophet Joel gives vivid expression to this aspect of the drought—"Is not your food cut off before your eyes: joy and gladness from the house of our God? The beasts have rotted in their dung, the barns are destroyed, the storehouses are broken down: because the corn is confounded. Why did the beast groan, why did the herds of cattle low? Because there is no pasture for them: yea, and the flocks of sheep are perished. To Thee, O Lord, will I cry: because fire hath devoured the beautiful places of the wilderness and the flame hath burnt all the trees of the country. Yea, and the beasts of the field have looked up to Thee, as a garden bed that thirsteth after rain: for the springs of waters are dried up and fire devoured the beautiful places of the wilderness."

The beasts of burden that were used in the work of agriculture consisted of oxen and asses trained to the plough; in the work of transport the camel was used; but in things that pertained to war the horse was the

most popular, both for chariot and cavalry purposes. The number of these animals, when Israel was in its prime, and fighting for its place amongst the nations of the East, was far beyond anything that experience of the present day would lead us to believe. For the food of the people, the two chief animals used were the goat and the sheep. Of one and of the other there was evidently a plentiful supply, and all found pasturage on the plains, or on the mountain-side, or the lofty hill, whereon the goat was a constant inhabitant. In those years in Palestine a man was reckoned rich in proportion to the number of the animals he had, and a king found his place amongst the nations, and his importance in council, in proportion to the number of his chariots and his horsemen. From this passing glance at the animal life in Samaria, and the regions around, we can gain a fairly correct idea of the loss, of the desolation, and of the suffering that must have been the lot of the owners of the animals, who were, consequently, the chief men of Israel.

When, therefore, King Achab called Abdias, the governor of his house, and said to him—"Go into the land unto all the fountains of waters, and into all the valleys, to see if we can find grass, and save the horses and the mules that the beasts may not utterly perish," we can judge of the severity of the water famine and of the effectiveness of the drought as a punishment on the people, because the beasts congregated in the royal stables for warlike purposes were the first to get attention, for the prestige of the kingdom was at stake, should the number of those animals suffer diminution. What must have been the straits to which the owners of the herds of cattle, horses, goats, etc., were reduced when the royal house had begun to feel the disastrous effects of the water famine?

Not only from this order of the king may we judge of

the intensity of the famine, but, from a passage in the same chapter, in which is declared the sentence, we have a most evident proof that things were universally in a bad way. The torrents around the Jordan should naturally be the last reservoirs of water, just as the plain around the river was of a certainty the last place to feel the drought that was fast spreading over the face of the doomed Samaria. Nevertheless, we read in the place mentioned—"But after some time the torrent was dried up, for it had not rained upon the earth," although it was to this very torrent that the Lord had directed the steps of the Prophet. It was evident that the God of Israel was so incensed against the king and the people that even to preserve the life of the Prophet, He would not send, even in a miraculous manner, the water required for the daily sustenance of the man of God. It was customary for the Jordan to overflow its banks once or twice a year, and sometimes oftener, but now the drought had so affected the river that its tributaries are dried up.

No wonder that in the years to come the writers of Israel should speak of the word of Elias as being a fiery torch that consumed all that came in its way. Most assuredly his word had dried up the plains of Samaria. It had blasted its fairest places. It had condemned to death its beasts of burden. Consequently, it had wiped away the glory of the house of Achab in destroying its horses and its mules. It had eaten into the cisterns where the life-stream of Israel ebbed and flowed. It had made the fountains no longer places to be sought and valued. It had dried up the rivers and the torrents. It had turned the face of the heavens into a huge dome through which neither the dew of heaven could percolate nor the rain dare to pass. The word of the Sacred Writer excellently expressed the condition of affairs when he said—"The word of Elias shut up the heaven."

CHAPTER IX

THE PROPHET IN HIDING

"And the word of the Lord came to him saying: Get thee hence, and go towards the east, and hide thyself by the torrent of Carith, which is over against the Jordan. And there thou shalt drink of the torrent: and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." So he went and did according to the word of the Lord. And going, "he dwelt by the torrent Carith, which is over against the Jordan."

Elias, having delivered his message—or, as some would have it, his ultimatum—to the king, would most naturally remain in, or near, the city until the first signs of the coming punishment, or until the king would manifest some token of repentance. On the part of the king, it was not so easy for him to take in the whole significance of the message until he had experienced the determination of the God of Israel to punish the betrayers of the people. We cannot doubt that, often and often, he had been warned by the many faithful servants of Yahveh, who were still to be found even in the city of Samaria, as to the inevitable punishment that should assuredly come to him—as it had so often come to those before him who had been renegade to the traditions of Israel. But success had so long crowned his labors, and the prosperity of the kingdom seemed so assured, that he could only with the greatest difficulty bring himself to think that the Lord would afflict him and his people—and that, too, in a very brief time. In the presence of the fact that things were going on well in the kingdom, and in his household, the

lessons of the past were easily forgotten. The truth that any change of heart on his part should bring him into collision with the strong-willed Jezabel was ever present to his mental gaze, and he had been so long dominated by her that it seemed the easier way out of his dilemma to chance what seemed to him only the probable wrath of Providence, rather than to face the certain anger of Jezabel. Weak characters of the type of Achab seek refuge in flight from impending evils, and, because the ways of Providence are usually milder and not so prone to demand the last pound of flesh, as is the custom amongst the children of this world, he preferred to procrastinate in doing the right, rather than face what he considered to be the inevitable. Besides, he had often been warned before, and the punishment either did not come, or was so long delayed that he could give himself some consolation now—even after the mighty words proclaimed by the Prophet, which words were ever ringing in his ears.

The uncertainty as to the course of Providence was rudely brushed aside by the appearance of the first signs of the anger of the God of Israel. As we have dared to suggest, these first signs became evident in the crops that were standing in the fields and were awaiting the rain, or at least the dew, without which they could never come to maturity, without which they were never destined to be cut down and gathered together in the fields and brought into the barns. The yield of the year preceding was almost consumed, or had been conveyed into other regions, and now, when the people were eagerly looking for the new yield, their hopes were shattered by this terrible drought. The lesson was not lost on the king, who, like all weak characters in the presence of the punishment brought on by their own folly, rushed to conclusions that were not at all warranted by the facts.

Elias, the Prophet, had been nothing more than an instrument in the hands of Providence, albeit a very willing one and a very energetic one, too; but the king seized on the fact that he had been the messenger of the evil tidings which had now become only too true, and so, without the power to reason, that one should find in strong characters, he did not distinguish between the messenger who was sent and the Lord Who was afflicting. Of this state of affairs Elias was not only aware, but was expecting it to be so.

It became evident to the Prophet that he had lingered long enough in the neighborhood of the king and his wife, but he did not dare to move, even though he knew his life was in danger. He felt confident that his mission was not yet complete, and so he had no desire to put himself in the power of an enemy who would not scruple, if it were necessary, to consent to his undoing. He understood thoroughly the mind of Achab; consequently, as the first signs of the drought appeared, he anxiously awaited a message from the Lord directing him as to his future course. He could not see that his remaining in Samaria any longer would benefit the cause of the God of Israel. At the same time, he refused to move from the city until he should have certain information as to the Lord's Will; for, now, more than ever, he found the necessity of divine guidance.

At this critical time came the message of the Lord, and in the words with which we have opened the present chapter. No longer was there any doubt as to the exact place wherein the Lord wished him to hide himself—for the present at least. Carith is now surrounded with uncertainty in regard to its exact location, but in the time of Elias it was not so. Evidently a place of retirement, it was still well known in the days of the Prophet. Sometimes when there is any uncertainty connected with places mentioned in the Scriptures, we find added

descriptions or quasi-titles that make more definite the locations. There is no note of identification with Carith when it is mentioned that Elias was ordered there by the Lord; hence, from this fact, we conclude that it was well known at the time, and we may reasonably assert that it was located either on the banks of the Jordan or at a little distance therefrom.

The Jordan is the only river, in the true sense of the word, that Palestine possesses. Formed by a number of little springs at the northern part of Meron, now called Lake Huleth, it receives the main body of its waters from a strong, foaming stream that comes from the western slope of Hermon, to which the name Hasbain has been given. Two other streams of lesser volume add their waters to what might be called the basin of the river, which is situated in a mysterious curtain of tangled plants and underwood. Having mustered its forces in this verdant plain, it makes directly for Tiberias, where it assumes the dimensions of a lake. In this stretch of the river there is a very notable fall; and it is to this part that the vivid descriptions by travellers apply when they describe the Jordan as "fierce and sullen and intractable," and as "being always in a hurry." During the months of January and March, when the tributaries of the river pour in their swollen waters, the flood rushes along with extraordinary and very dangerous rapidity. The force of the swirling waters is so great that they have dug for themselves a great depression; and the sides or banks of the river are torn and ragged. Nevertheless, the Jordan has changed less than any other river in the last thousand years. The characteristics that are so noticeable to-day must have been the same in the distant long ago, for the name of the river is derived from a root-word which means "to descend." Although the distance from Tiberias to the Dead Sea is greater than

from Huleth to Tiberias, the fall is not so great; nevertheless, it preserves its characteristic movement—albeit in a lesser degree—until it empties itself into the Dead Sea.

Any place in the valley of the Jordan would have been a suitable abode for one desiring to conceal oneself from the notice of the public.

The Jordan descends from the southern end of the lake of Tiberias between two plateaux, on one side being a wall of steep and precipitous cliffs, ranging in height from 800 feet to about 1,000; on the other side, steep hills. Through a battered and crippled region the river flows, twisting like a great snake. On either side is a dense tropical jungle, the habitat of wild beasts and of poisonous reptiles. The scenery becomes bolder and grander as the river hurries to the south. Even there, the current is strong and practically unnavigable. It is a lonely place, and one that is not so accessible to the ordinary traveller. In so far as we know, there has never been a place of importance built on its banks thereabouts. On the western bank of the river several perennial streams enter, and add to the volume of, the rapid current. From the eastern side, however, descend the rather important rivers—at least proportionately so—the Hieromax and the Jabboc. The former drains the plains of the Land of Bashan, and the latter the hills of Gilead. Near the latter place, that is to say, at its confluence with the Jordan, is a ford at which the traveller can find his way across. Above the "Brook Jabboc," there is another ford at Beisan. It is well to remark, however, that the fords are treacherous, and have shifting bottoms and changing currents. The feet of the pilgrims who bathe in the Jordan sink dangerously in the mud, and should they venture too far out they are in danger of being swept away by the swirling eddies.

The object of this brief description of the river Jordan is to make clear to our readers that the Prophet could have found a hiding-place at almost any part of its course. If we except the immediate neighborhood of the recognised fords, any place might be selected for an abode fairly safe from the interference of prying travellers. Our difficulty is to find a location that would best tally with the requirements of the then position of the man of God, whose life was ever in danger because of his connection with the message that brought the terrible drought upon the land of Israel. We must seek for the torrent Carith somewhere along the banks of the river or close to the mouths of the tributaries which empty themselves into it. We must of necessity seek the place that was least likely to suffer from the drought; in other words, we must look for the stream that poured its waters for the longest period into the main river.

Tradition has placed the hiding-place of Elias not at a great distance from the city of Jericho. Here "the road descends into Wadi el-Kelt, a gloomy gorge, five or six hundred feet deep, with a stream of singing water between its prison walls. Tradition calls this the brook Carith, where Elija hid himself from Ahab and was fed by Arabs of a tribe called the Ravens." We need not, however, become too certain of this place; neither do we place much credence on the statement that Arabs, and not ravens, fed the Prophet. Indeed, the writer already quoted adds—"But the prophet's hiding-place was certainly on the other side of the Jordan."

On the eastern bank of the river the streams that rushed into the Jordan are more numerous, and they present greater facilities for one desiring to hide oneself. There, too, the water continues to flow when the western side is already a victim of the drought. There is another and a far more convincing reason for the

location of Carith on the eastern bank rather than elsewhere, namely that, being on that side of the river, the Prophet should thus have the Jordan between himself and his sworn enemies who, undoubtedly, were seeking him, and not for his own good.

Not a few writers seem impressed with the neighborhood of Bethshan, or, as the moderns call it, Bysan, as a likely place to afford shelter for the much-sought Prophet. This city is a few miles to the south-east of Jezrahel, and on a height that seems to guard the lowest part of the ascent from the Jordan. Close by the city is the not insignificant river of Jalud, which empties itself into the Jordan, and, owing to its proximity to the mountains, carries its stream for a longer time than most other rivers on the same side, that is to say, the western. It is in the near neighborhood of Carmel, the favorite abode of the prophets. Then, again, in the subsequent days, the journey to Sarephta of the Sidonians would not necessitate a passing through the kingdom of Samaria. Where the Jalud flows into the Jordan we have quite a number of valley-plains; but these, whilst they give the appearance of fertility and richness, are the home of the wild animal and the jungle birds. There, as elsewhere, along the banks on either side are openings that can be transformed into living-caves, just as to-day may be seen hermits and solitaries spending their lives in those rocky and mouldy nests that seem more suitable for the river-fowl and the beasts. After the lapse of nigh three thousand years, Greek monks are now endeavoring to hide themselves from the world as Elias once hid himself from Achab and Jezabel.

Any of the places that have been pointed out as the hiding-place for the Prophet, before we could accept them as the acceptable probable abodes, must, in our opinion, be far away from any of the principal towns that are near to the banks of the Jordan. Travellers

going to and fro on business were very apt to approach the banks of the river; for, there they could rest quietly, close to the cooling waters. Apart from the recognised places of meeting along the route that lay beside the river, there were always visitors, led on either by curiosity or by religious zeal, who, if they did not make a home there, at least spent much time in those secluded places. The anger of the king and queen was well known throughout the kingdom, and even beyond its limits; hence, all who came by that way at that particular time were sure to be interested in the whereabouts of him who had attracted such attention throughout the kingdoms of Israel and Juda.

Closely connected with the important question anent the location of the "torrent Carith" mentioned in the Book of Kings is one that has given to biblical critics an occasion for much speculation, namely—"Who or what were the messengers that brought to the Prophet his daily food?" From a prudent solution of this question we can gain an insight into the kind of place wherein Elias was in hiding. We quote the Douay version of the Bible, which expresses the common opinion of the Fathers in reference to the messengers chosen by God to feed His servant—"And I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." Again, in the same chapter, we read—"And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning and bread and flesh in the evening." At the very outset, it must be admitted that the Hebrew word for "ravens" and the word for "Arabs" are very much alike, and could be very well confounded, the one with the other, by transcribers and interpreters.

There is nothing improbable in the assertion that the messengers who brought the food to the Prophet might be Arabs. Along the banks of the Jordan were congregated, here and there, members of tribes that

were totally alien to the Hebrew population. They were wandering peoples of the Bedouin type who still lived in the primitive manner, that is to say, under canvas or in the already-made nests that were in the river-banks. Very probably, too, they came from Arabia, or from the parts beyond the great desert, or, mayhap, from the southern lands. Whatever may have been the origin of those nomad travellers, or wandering Arabs, they were a nation totally apart from the people of Israel. To them they paid no tribute; they were not in any sense under their sway, or government, although they were, by a kind of prescriptive right, allowed to wander here and there, and even to settle in villages, and thus to form little communities. That these wandering tribes of the desert should evince a charitable reverence towards the Prophet, whom probably they knew only from his manner of life, is not by any means beyond the bounds of possibility. Hence, although we do not accept the meaning given by so many to the interpretation of the passage in question, neither do we see any improbability in the opinion of these learned critics.

Briefly, our reasons for accepting the rendering to be found in the Douay version of the Bible, apart from the overwhelming fact that it is the common opinion of the Fathers of the Church, are: firstly, the necessity of secrecy in regard to the whereabouts of the Prophet; secondly, the greatest possible distance should separate him from the common haunts of men; thirdly, the implied regularity of the food supplied, as well as the unvarying quality of it; finally, it is the reading that makes the circumstances of time, and place, and person, most in harmony, the one with the other.

The command issued to the Prophet was to hide himself; consequently, every precaution necessary from a human point of view should be taken by the man of

God so as to do his part in the work of the Lord. He was to go where the water was flowing, and should continue so for the longest possible period, notwithstanding the drought; for it seemed that the Lord was willing to send food in what, to us, appears a miraculous manner, but He will do nothing to obtain water for any part of the drought-stricken regions. The food came regularly, as we are told. If Elias were depending on the charity of people, no matter how faithful, since he was not living in the same abode with them, it is not probable that the supply should be so constant, with no fear of failure. We must remember that the man of God did not seek his food, it was brought to him. Those who know the habits and customs of bird-life are well aware that the food brought was just such as could be expected from "ravens." The fact that the raven was numbered amongst the unclean birds helps, rather than hinders, the common interpretation; this is a point specially dwelt upon by the Fathers in their commentaries. The ravens sought the lonely places where the concourse of men was least, and where they could build their nests and bring forth their young unmolested by wayfarers. We have similar incidents mentioned in the lives of the Fathers of the desert, wherein it is related that the carriers of food were birds which in the Mosaic Law should be accounted unclean.

Owing to the quality of the food and its regularity, some commentators have given as their opinion that the messengers were angels and that the food came from the table of the king and queen, who were thus made to feed one at least of the prophets of the Lord. Here we may conveniently refer to a tradition that has found a passing notice in the annals of Carmel. During the seclusion of the Prophet in his rocky cell close by the Jordan, it occurred to him that, to successfully struggle against the powers at work to destroy the religion of the

people of Israel, a permanent body of men was necessary. These men should be filled with the spirit of the Lord and should burn with zeal even as he himself was afire with it. They should be called from the distractions of family life, and live for God alone; and, in so far as was possible, in solitude and quiet they were to prepare themselves to be the instruments of the God of Israel when He should require them. According to the tradition, he actually put into execution his preconceived plan, and called around him a number of kindred souls whom he instructed in the doctrine and the ritual of the new manner of life. This was, the tradition narrates, the beginning of the "School of the Prophets." The new subjects were, of course, "*filii prophetarum*," but with new ideals, with new ritual, with new manner of dress and life.

Interesting as the narrative may be, and not totally devoid of all probability, we must, however, say that we cannot accept it. The idea of the flight of the Prophet was to hide himself. The injunction so plainly given him would not admit of intercourse with, and the constant presence of many disciples. Difficult as it must have been for the Prophet himself to hide from the thorough search sure to be made for him, it would be seemingly impossible to conceal the whereabouts of a large number of men. We are informed that the assistance of the ravens was necessary to obtain his daily food—this fact cannot well be reconciled with the presence of a community that could not subsist without the necessaries of life. It was not the time to draw around him the aspirants to the newer prophetic life. It was not the place suitable for the formation of the new School of the Prophets.

It is not at all improbable that it was during those days of solitude and prayer the idea came to him that the salvation of the spirit of the people and the pre-

servation of their loyalty to the traditions of their fathers demanded a more perfect life amongst the "*filii prophetarum*"—that is to say, those who with sincere motive had adopted the prophetic rule.

We see no reason why one cannot accept the place indicated by Cornelius a Lapide, close by the city of Phaselus, near to which there are many streams that rush down from the heights of Ephraim; and, in the neighborhood, there are also many caves wherein fugitives could easily find secure hiding. We must not forget that there, also, has been built the church over the so-called cave of Elias, and the choice of the site goes back to the years of the pious Empress Helena, who caused the church to be erected there, precisely because of the traditions then so venerable.

This latter site is, indeed, outside the limits of the kingdom of Achab, but it is on the lower side of Samaria, and, hence, to reach Sarephta of Sidonia, the Prophet should have to pass right through the land of the princes who sought his life, and, just at that particular time, with special vindictiveness. It seems to us that the abode of the Prophet was either on the confines of the kingdom of Samaria or, more likely, entirely outside them; so that, when he would receive the call from the Lord, he could pass to the place indicated without endangering his life overmuch, and, above all, so as not to have to experience the inconveniences that were so sure to be encountered in the interior of the stricken regions. We need not necessarily include every step of the Prophet as miraculous, though there is no denying the constant supervision, in an extraordinary manner, on the part of the God of Israel. But it by no means is necessary to hold that the Lord had done away with all personal responsibility on the part of the Prophet. The very fact that he was told "to hide himself" is sufficient proof that the Lord required his

co-operation, and also the use of ordinary means when such were sufficient and necessary. The upper part of the Jordan, that is to say, between the river Jalud and the Yarmock—the one on the eastern bank and the other on the western—would seem to be the best place to suit the circumstances that attended on the sojourn and the subsequent events in connection with the hiding of the Prophet. Burchardt says of this part—"The valley of the Jordan, or El Ghor, has near Bysan (Bethshan) a direction of north by east and south by west. . . . . The great number of rivulets which descend from the mountains on both sides, and form stagnant pools, produce in many places a pleasing verdure, and a luxuriant growth of wild herbage and grass; but the greater part of the ground is a parched desert, of which a few spots are cultivated by the Bedouins."

CHAPTER X

THE WIDOW OF SAREPHTA OF THE SIDONIANS

"And after some time the torrent was dried up, for it had not rained upon the earth. Then the word of the Lord came to him saying: Arise and go to Sarephta of the Sidonians and dwell there: for I have commanded a widow woman there to feed thee."

The Sacred Writer does not inform us as to the time that the Prophet spent in his hiding-place at the torrent of Carith, so some commentators have given his sojourn as months, others as years, in Carith. Neither are we informed of the reason why he left the torrent, save that there was no water. It is quite possible that there were other important reasons, as suggested by many pious writers. Nevertheless, we must be satisfied with the one reason given—and, indeed, it seems quite sufficient—although the water-supply could just as easily have been brought to the Prophet as had been his miraculously-given meals, except that, in refusing to give any help of the former kind, the Lord was showing His unrelenting determination to punish Israel and, with the Samarians, all who should find themselves within reach of the regions immediately affected by the water-famine—not excepting His own servants and friends.

If we place the torrent of Carith in the upper passage of the Jordan, we can easily extend the time of the Prophet's sojourn into months and years; whereas, if we follow the opinion of those who have selected the hiding-place in the lower, or southern, part of the river's course, we must concede that the effects of the drought should be felt much sooner there than in the

upper portion of the river. As we have already pointed out, if the Prophet were in hiding in the lower parts of the river, he should either pass across the Jordan and thence to the north, and then pass once more over the Jordan to reach the territories in which was the city of Sarephta, or, failing that long and very troublesome journey, he should pass through the territory of Samaria and run all the risks of meeting with the officials of King Achab, who were evidently on the look-out for the Prophet by the orders of the king. If, however, we choose a position for Carith on the northern banks of the Jordan, then the journey to the city of Sarephta could not possibly have either the hardships or the dangers of the former one.

The city is called Sarephta of the Sidonians, although in the preceding ages it was considered almost equal to the great city of Sidon. It was not, by any means, as old as the latter city, for Sidon was "the first-born of Canaan," and claimed to be the oldest of all the Phœnician cities. From its proximity to Sidon, and owing to the fact that it was evidently held in bondage to that city, at least in the time of Elias, we may conclude that the god of the more important, and, we may add, the governing, city was the god of Sarephta. The fishermen who first founded the city of Sidon had chosen as their god, Said, and he seems to have been the favorite deity even until the last days of the city's greatness. The occupation of the fishermen of Sidon must have been the same as that of the people of the city of Sarephta, for it, too, was chiefly dependent on the murex, with its precious purple dye, and the various operations by which the dye was prepared and made ready for exportation. Hence, we can with a good deal of certainty point to this god as one of the chief amongst the deities worshipped in Sarephta. But the deity best known in connection with the history of Sidon and, we may conclude also, of its possessions, is the goddess

Astarthe. Sarephta is on the Mediterranean coast and about mid-way between Tyre and Sidon; and, no doubt, when the city of Sidon became tributary to Tyre, so also did the city of Sarephta. It, doubtless, shared in the busy life of the two great cities, and we know that although its fleet never became so noteworthy as those of Tyre and Sidon, nevertheless, it possessed an important one. Indeed, a fleet of some kind was more or less a necessity for any place situated along the coast, which was a trade route between countries that were of importance both as to population and commerce.

Because of the appearance of the Prophet in this city, it has been proposed by some writers that the city was Israelitish, although in the dominion of the Sidonians. There were certain cities which, although outside the particular district of the tribe to which the population originally belonged, were, nevertheless, portions of the tribal property, and the manners and the customs of the tribe or clan were as religiously observed in those cities or towns as they would be in the heart of their own tribal district. There is really no adequate reason why we should make of Sarephta a city of Israel; in fact, there is every reason for stating that it was not. Neither does it seem to us necessary to regard the widow, to whom Elias was sent, as a recognised member of the tribe of Israel. The claim that has been founded on the text of one of the Gospels is not quite convincing—nay, it is rather quite the opposite. We refer to the words of Saint Luke—" In truth I say to you, there were many widows in the days of Elias in Israel, when heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there was a great famine throughout all the earth. And to none of them was Elias sent, but to Sarephta of Sidon, to a widow woman." If we were to argue from this text that the widow was really an Israelite, then we should be forced to draw the same conclusion in the example

following, namely, in the very next verse of Saint Luke—"And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet: and none of them was cleansed but Naaman the Syrian." We are well aware that he was called "Syrian," not as a mere kind of distinction, and we further know from the story, as told in the Book of Kings, that Naaman was not an Israelite. He had only come to his knowledge of the prophet Eliseus by means of an Israelite maid-servant in his house. The narrative is quite clear on all these matters.

The ways of Providence are remarkable, and, at times, lessons are given by the Lord to His people to prove that, if others had received the gifts and the graces which they had already received, there would be more gratitude displayed by those who had not been "chosen" and who could not be reputed as the "favored ones" of the Lord. It is, in a word, the old doctrine so often announced in Holy Writ, and so very clearly expressed in the famous admonition by Our Divine Lord—"Woe to thee, Corozain, woe to thee, Bethsaida, for if in Tyre and Sidon had been done the mighty works that have been done in thee, long since would they have done penance in sackcloth and ashes."

There is no reason, then, why we should not consider Sarephta as a city like unto Tyre and Sidon, not so populous nor so busy, perhaps, yet, just as they were, full of life and energy—not at all unlike our ordinary manufacturing cities of the present day, wherein everything is sacrificed to the gods of materialism and worldly progress. In those cities, wherein one would least expect to find any hearts loyal to the lights given them by God, are to be found, from time to time, people who seem to have meditated on the truth in so far as it has been revealed to them, who follow the rays of divine light accorded to them, in a manner far more faithful, far more loyal, than do those who have been brought

up in surroundings where religious truth is publicly taught, where there are very many examples of Christian life, where it would seem that the Voice of God is ever summoning and calling to one and all. In the Old Testament we have many such examples, and they are given as a kind of rebuff to "the chosen people," to whom was allotted the custody of the Law and the Traditions of the Lord. In the New Testament we have so many examples where the testimony to this great fact is undoubted; it was Our Lord Himself Who said—"Amen, Amen, I say to you I have not found such faith in Israel." The history of the Church in the earlier, and the later, times is full of incidents that recall those examples of the Old and New Testaments. Many of us can remember in our own experiences such testimonies of the fidelity of the human heart under circumstances where fidelity should not, naturally, be expected or sought for. We have, then, in the city of Sarephta of the Sidonians an example of this singular fidelity to the light as seen by a poor soul in humble circumstances, this marvellous fidelity to the laws that should govern every well-regulated life—no matter how poor the surroundings, no matter how heavy the cross that must be borne. There is no reason why we should insist that the widow of Sarephta was an Israelite. It is quite sufficient to recognise that she had found favor with the God of Israel because of some inscrutable reason that lies outside our province to probe or to weigh. Simply, it is forced upon us that the ways of God are not according to our standards; nor are they to be questioned because we cannot see sufficient reason according to our judgment.

The opinion of those who maintain that the torrent of Carith was somewhere inside the dominions of King Achab seems very reasonable if we pay attention to the command that was given to Elias—"Arise and go to

Sarephta of the Sidonians." Here, we have the opposition clearly implied between the place where he was hiding and a place outside the boundaries of Samaria. The drought was causing serious devastation in the dominions where he was, and discontent was possessing every soul, and, thus, the Lord ordered that he should go outside the domains of the king, who now evidently sought him everywhere, and with no friendly motive. We may, at the same time, realise how deeply touched was the land of Samaria by the continued water-famine, when even the torrents were being dried up and, to all appearances, the water of the great river seemed to have been seriously diminished. Not only was that so, but the regions in the neighborhood of Samaria were gravely threatened by the water-famine, as we shall presently see.

The Fathers of the Church have, again and again, referred to the flight of Elias, and his taking refuge in a strange land, to be the guest of a poor widow woman who had not even the necessaries of life, and yet was quite willing to divide the last crust and the last little measure of oil with this stranger. They draw the contrast vividly between the conduct of those in his own country, Samaria, and the conduct of a stranger, in a strange land. In this incident they find a prefiguring of the rejection of the Son of Man by the Jews and His reception amongst the Gentiles. It is not our purpose to follow, in all its theological and historical beauty, the conception of the Fathers; and it is here mentioned, should any of our readers wish to engage in a matter that is of deepest interest to every Christian student.

CHAPTER XI

THE MIRACLES IN SAREPHTA OF THE SIDONIANS

After the lapse of so many centuries, it is almost idle to discuss the question—why the Lord chose Sarephta of the Sidonians as the next place of abode for His Prophet? It is readily admitted that there was some special reason for the choice of this city. Sidon, to which Sarephta in the reign of Achab was subject, had been in the portion of lands assigned to Aser. In point of antiquity, it was of more importance than its more successful neighbor, Tyre, although the vicissitudes of time found Sidon under the domination of the powerful neighbor. We find the city of Sarephta mentioned in the prophecy of Abdias, who has been surmised to be the same person as the minister of Achab who protected the prophets of the Lord when they were being persecuted by Jezabel, the wife of Achab—"And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel, all the places of the Canaanites even to Sarephta." Here, the city occupies its prominent place in the prophet's mind, because it is to be the extreme limit of the possessions of the children of the captivity.

Although Sarephta, like Sidon, had shed somewhat of its ancient glory, nevertheless, it was a busy port, as well as a place to which workmen of the various arts betook themselves. For this reason, a traveller to Sarephta could pass through its streets without attracting any special attention. In the days of Elias it was not at all so important as either Tyre or Sidon, hence, between Samaria and Sarephta there was not such intercourse as, naturally, there must have been between the

two former cities and Samaria. The union of the house of Ethbaal and the house of Israel had been effected quite recently and, thus, the influence of the fierce and unrelenting queen must have been very strong in either great city. Naturally, this influence could not be so strong in Sarephta, where the people still had their aspirations for their former greatness, and, in all probability, the yoke of the Sidonians was not too pleasing to the inhabitants of the smaller sea-port. Residing in Sarephta, Elias could have all the information necessary in regard to the happenings in Samaria, even though in the smaller place the effects of the terrible drought were not so keenly felt as in the places of larger population.

In his rocky home by the Jordan the Prophet saw nothing of the effects of his pronouncement against the land of Israel. There, his daily meal was prepared, and the running water passed the door of his cell; hence, he knew nought of the havoc his words were working in the regions outside. Arrived in the city, where men were depending on the yield of the soil in a way they could not be elsewhere, he was brought face to face with the results of the anger of the God of Israel. The suffering was all around; in the homes of the poor; in the mansions of the rich; the little child suffered as did the grown-up person; the innocent was tried even as the criminal; right and left did the anger of God strike. And if there in the city the effects were felt so keenly, what must it have been in Samaria and in the villages of that land that had called Baal its god? Another element was added—that is to say, his own contribution to the general mead of suffering. Perhaps it was only in this way that the terrible nature of the crime committed by the people was brought home to the man of God. It seems a mere truism to say that he better understood their sorrow, and thus better came to a

knowledge of its cause, by being made a sharer in their afflictions.

If the Prophet were in hiding near to Phaselus, as seemed probable to a Lapide, then his journey must have been one of danger and of excessive toil. The detour that he must have taken to avoid the officials of Jezabel, who were seeking him, included a crossing and then a re-crossing of the Jordan, and a toilsome journey along the eastern bank of the river. If we assume that he was in the higher valley of the Jordan, even then he had a laborious and unpleasant journey before him, for it was through a region that had begun to feel severely the effects of the drought. The water in the most favored part of the country had failed, since the Lord had bidden him to go elsewhere. Having seen the stream that had been his drink for so many months dry up, he knew that the way to be traversed to reach the other station mentioned by the Lord must be through a country afflicted deeply with the drought. He had no expectation that the Lord would supply any water on the way, when He refused to give it in the cell by the Jordan. In this, the God of Israel seemed unbending, namely, that no water, even in a miraculous manner, was to come to the land of Samaria.

Elias, doubtless, observed the Eastern custom and did not begin his journey until the cooler hours of the evening; but, once begun, he may not have taken the ordinary precautions during the remaining days of his travelling. No matter from what point his journey commenced, it was a long and weary one. Making his way over the arid plains and mounting the rocky heights, either by day or by night, was a painful work. In such journeys the great necessity is water. Even as the crow flies, the distance from the nearest probable abode of the Prophet is more than a hundred miles. There was

no water; at least not so much as would satisfy a thirsty traveller was likely to be found on the way. The dew that at other times could be relied upon to take the place of the drought did not appear during those nights. Indeed, the hot winds of the day were succeeded by the cold, and dry, and consequently scorching, winds of the night, so that for the parched traveller there was no relief. In this journey to the city he had a very vivid appreciation of the terrible havoc done by the drought announced by him in the kingly palace of Achab. As soon as the foot-weary and thirst-parched traveller saw a kindly face, he broke into the lamentation which had burned itself, from cruel experience, into his very fibre—"Give me a little water in a vessel that I may drink." The humanity of the man is touching. He feels and he shows that he is as the rest of men, even though by his word the Lord had shut the rains and the dews of heaven from the land of Israel and the surrounding countries that had shared in its guilt. The Prophet was well aware of the great scarcity of water, and, above all, it must have occurred to him that the poor woman whom he met at the gate of the city had not much of the precious liquid to spare. He was a stranger, but she knew the rules of hospitality, and she could not refuse the petition of him who looked in such a woe-begotten plight. He may have recalled that the Lord had said to him—"Arise and go to Sarephta of the Sidonians and dwell there: for I have commanded a widow woman there to feed thee." On the other hand, it may not for the moment have occurred to him. Such was his condition that the very sight of a kindly face was sufficient to give him courage to express the thought that was foremost in his soul. The request made to this stranger-woman best expresses the nature of the journey and the terrible effects of it on the man of God. It tells its own story of the drought

in the lands that lay adjacent to, even though they were not inside, the region proscribed by God.

Whatever may have been the real reason why the Lord had selected the city of Sarephta for His Prophet, one thing appears quite certain, namely, that he had softened the time of exile in this pagan city by choosing a hostess who would possess all the qualities that could grace a faithful daughter of "the chosen people." Approaching the city, he saw outside the walls a poor woman gathering sticks—evidently for household purposes. And, although from the evidently painful fact that she had been forced to leave her home to seek, outside the city walls, sufficient material for a fire, nevertheless, the confidence of the Prophet was not shaken, and he knew that, if this apparently very poor woman were destined by the Lord to be his hostess, neither he nor she should suffer for doing the Will of the Lord. If he had any doubt as to the poverty of the woman whom he saw collecting firewood outside the city, those doubts were soon dispelled when the poor woman replied to his request for a little to eat—"And she answered: As the Lord liveth. I have no bread but only a handful of meal in a pot, and a little oil in a cruse. Behold, I am gathering two sticks that I may go in and dress it, for me and my son, that we may eat it and die."

Although in supplying the water requested she was making a great sacrifice, yet she was willing to share her portion with him; but, when he asked for the food, she had not the same right to share her meagre store with the Prophet, for she had a son who was depending on her, and though she could, and would, make a sacrifice on her own part, she had not such right to do so on the part of the child who had been committed to her care by God. The water was not so scarce in the city as it had been outside the walls and in the country

through which the Prophet passed, but the real effects of the drought had been felt in the shortened supplies that had come from the surrounding country, and particularly from Samaria. The failure of the crops had been long felt in the city, because of the duration of the famine. And it is quite evident that the famine had reached such a crisis that the poor woman had resigned herself to the worst and expected that, when her present scanty store had been exhausted, there was no hope, save the release by death, for herself and her son—"That we may eat and die!"

It is quite evident that she had no revelation from the Lord as to her office of hostess to His servant, Elias. She was in the beginning acting only from the promptings of a heart that was sincerely and profoundly charitable; a heart that was full of love for God's creatures, and yet, well aware of her own duties as a mother. At the wish of the fatigued and wearied traveller she was going to fetch the water, making no delay, even though her store of it was surely scanty. It was with pain and sorrow that she heard the second request of the traveller—"Bring me also, I beseech thee, a morsel of bread in thy hand." Thereupon, she was face to face with a difficulty that only the well-trained heart of an Eastern can appreciate. Her child was awaiting her return for the meagre repast—the last she could hope to give to it—and yet her soul yearned to help this man whom she instinctively knew to be a good man, and whom she doubtless recognised from his appearance to be one of those holy men who preached penance to Israel. She was well aware of what her duty should be in ordinary circumstances, but the circumstances in which she now found herself were not ordinary circumstances. The quiet and the motherly protest which she made enhances the faith that was inherent in the acts that she afterwards did.

The recital of the poor woman, and the manner in which she made it, convinced the man of God that she was truly the person pointed out by the Lord; hence, he had no fear in asking that his request should be granted, knowing well that the Lord would reward an hundredfold the charity of the woman. The answer of the Prophet is singularly full of that confidence in God which has ever been his characteristic from his first appearance in the sacred Pages—"And Elias said to her: Fear not, but go, and do as thou hast said. But first make for me of the same meal a little hearth cake, and bring it to me; and after make for thyself and thy son." And lest the task should try her faith in himself too much, he added—"For thus saith the Lord the God of Israel: The pot of meal shall not waste, nor the cruse of oil be diminished, until the day wherein the Lord will give rain upon the face of the earth." Before any words are proffered as to the miracle, it would be interesting to advert to the fact that we have here a positive proof that all the inconveniences, both as to food and water, that were endured in the city of Sarephta, were the outcome of the drought which came upon Israel at the prayer of Elias, for the miracle brought to pass at the word of the Prophet was to have its material effects until "the day wherein the Lord will give rain upon the face of the earth." It was not, then, merely because of the presence of Elias that the plenty was given to the home of the widow, as we can observe from the fact that, when he had gone on his journey to the land of Samaria and when he was in hiding awaiting the time to appear before the king, the home of the widow was to be still blessed by the abundance given at the word of Elias, the man of God. The terrible famine caused by the heavens refusing the rain and the dew on the fields of Israel was not confined to that unhappy land, but extended to all the regions

in the neighborhood. Historians have found in other sources of information references to certain famines which seem to have been fairly broadcast and of which one might write as we find it so often expressed in the Sacred Chronicles, in regard to the drought brought to pass by Elias, namely, that it was "over the face of the earth." This famine was, indeed, very extensive in its ravages, and seemed to have affected all the regions in the neighborhood, and also all the countries which were dependent on this portion of Palestine—which, as we have before mentioned, was a kind of granary for the countries that were in communication with the valley of "El Ghor."

It was the custom amongst the Eastern people to invite the stranger who lingered at the gate of the city, or in the streets thereof, to be a guest. Hence, the traveller, who had not been provided beforehand with some definite place wherein to rest, would remain at the gate, or rather at one of the gates, or in the street, of the city until some citizen should happen to pass by and, then, he was sure to receive an invitation to enter some tent or house, and, thus, receive not only the hospitality of the table but also the use of a bed-chamber. Owing to the terrible crisis into which the famine had led the citizens of Sarephta, their hospitality, very naturally, must have been severely circumscribed. We can only attribute the action of the widow of Sarephta, in extending her hospitality to Elias, to a mighty grace from God, since, in so far as human means could accomplish anything in the attention owed to a traveller, she was completely helpless; and to invite a stranger to her home, no matter how it might be in accordance with the customs of the country, and also according to the dictates of a charitable heart, seemed folly and worse, for she evidently expected death in her family owing to the

famine. In regard to the customary treatment given to travellers in those Eastern climes, we have a very good example of it in the Book of Genesis. When Lot saw the two angels, whom he took to be visitors to the city, it was after the following manner he acted—"And Lot was sitting in the gate of the city. And, seeing them, he arose up and went to meet them: and worshipped prostrate to the ground. And said: I beseech you, my lords, turn into the house of thy servant, and lodge there. Wash your feet, and in the morning you shall go on your way. He pressed them very much to turn in unto him; and when they were come in to his house he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread; and they ate." The courteous treatment of the traveller is inculcated in the Holy Scriptures very often; and the degeneracy of those people or citizens who break through this Eastern custom, or violate it, is strongly insisted on by forceful examples.

The charitable soul of the widow of Sarephta has emboldened many writers to suppose that she was either a born Israelite or, at least, one who had been united in marriage to an Israelite. This latter suggestion is not outside the limits of probability. However, as we have before said, she seems to have been a soul that had found favor with the God of Israel, and it is very probable that Elias was not, by any means, the first of the prophets of the Lord to have received charity and courtesy at her hands and in her house. For this, and many other reasons known only to God, she merited the great favor to be his divinely-appointed hostess. "She went and did according to the word of Elias. And he ate, and she, and her house: and from that day the pot of meal wasted not, and the cruse of oil was not diminished, according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke in the hand of Elias."

No matter what may have been the religious atmo-

sphere in which she had been brought up, the widow of Sarephta had some belief and, without doubt, much knowledge of the God of Israel; for, when she replied to the request of Elias after he had desired a morsel of food, she used the very words that were apt to impress the Prophet, words she would not have used were she unaware of their significance to the man of God, for whom, apparently, she had already conceived a reverential awe—"As the Lord, thy God, liveth. I have no bread." She knew that by thus affirming her poverty she should be at once believed, and so it happened. Consequently, when she heard the promise made by the Prophet as to the future abundance in her house, she seemed not to hesitate for a moment, but at once believed, and acted. The result was a magnificent confirmation of her faith in the servant of God, and so, indirectly, if not directly, in the God Whom he served and of Whom she had already spoken. Living in the regions not far distant from the Israelites, and knowing from familiar intercourse with "the chosen people" of the many wondrous things that had been brought to pass at the word of the holy men who were well known not only inside the confines of Israel, but also outside, she made a practical act of faith in the God Whom these men served by following the instructions given her by Elias. If, by some special illumination of her intellect, she had come to a knowledge of who her visitor was, the inference should have been simple enough, namely, that he, at whose word the God of Israel shut up the heavens, could give that which he had promised to her and her house.

The miracle, although of very great importance to the widow and her household, was not a miracle unheard of before, and it was one to be succeeded by many other miracles similar in nature and kind in the years to come. The multiplication of the meal and the oil was a

series of events of the same nature as the food-supply hitherto given to the Prophet in his hiding-place close by the torrent Carith. That pious commentators see in it a type of the multiplication of the bread and fishes of the New Testament is not to be wondered at; neither are we surprised that they see in it something that speaks of that greater and more wondrous supply of heavenly food to be given to the children of the Church, when "the fulness of time" had come.

In the scriptural narrative of the meeting between Elias and the widow of Sarephta, there is only one passage that presents a difficulty to the student, and it is the sentence—"for I have commanded a widow woman there to feed thee." If we accept these words in their strict signification, we should presume that the Lord had already informed the woman of her duty to the stranger traveller. This does not fit in with the whole scene as described in the Book of Kings. It would be too much to expect that the event should be told in all its minutiæ; otherwise the work of the chronicler should be, as it were, infinite, because, if this event could demand such minute description, so also would others that seem of greater moment. We can content ourselves with the knowledge that we have the salient points of an event worth recording in the life of this great man of God; nor is it reasonable to expect more than the salient points of the meeting. The scene might easily be reconstructed thus:—Elias, foot-weary and travel-stained approaches the walls of the city which he believes to be Sarephta. He sees outside the walls of the city a woman gathering sticks, which he knows are for firewood; but evidently there are very few sticks to be found, and she has been able to gather only two. Recalling the words of the Lord when he was about to depart from Carith, that a woman should be his hostess while he remained in Sarephta, consequently, he speaks

to the woman, saluting her in the manner of her nation, and asking as to the city—its name and its citizens. She, on her part, is taken with the solemnity and the evident sanctity of this stranger, to whom she is drawn in a reverential awe. She makes no excuse for the seeming want of courtesy, for the traveller must have observed that since she is forced to gather a few sticks for her fire, he could not expect the usual hospitality from her household. The conversation then was centred on the famine that had fallen on the city, and it was not at all unlikely that the rumor had reached her of the cause of the drought in the land of Israel. From such conversation the Prophet came to a knowledge of the state of the city and, very naturally, suspected the deep want in the household of the woman. Nevertheless, he asked for a drink. No matter how desperate were the conditions in her household, she would not refuse the traveller, seeing that he was so fatigued and worn. Then came the request for food, which brought the confession of the scanty store and the imminent deaths in her household—deaths that were to be the result of the famine. Little by little, the Lord was preparing her for the command of the Prophet, which was in reality the command of the Lord.

With the advent of the man of God, whose sanctity was now assured to her by the constant miracle going on in her household day by day, she and her household had both meal and oil, although outside the household there was a grievous want, and that, too, on all sides. We do not know what time had elapsed since the miracle began before a very sad happening came to destroy the peace of mind of the mother and to lessen the authority of the Prophet. "And it came to pass after this that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick. And the sickness was very grievous, so that there was no breath left in him." The death of her only son

should, in the natural course, have made her forget the common courtesy due to a visitor, should have destroyed even the remembrance of the miracle by which her grateful guest had saved this same son, as well as herself and her household; but the narrative adds—"And she said to Elias: What have I to do with thee, thou man of God? Art thou come to me that my iniquities should be remembered and that thou shouldst kill my son?"

In these words, addressed to the Prophet when she was in her dire distress at the loss of her only son, she reveals her true character. In fact, we have here a key to the whole dispensation of Providence towards one not of the chosen people, one who had not the advantages of knowing, as the Israelites knew, the true God. She is not carried away with any idea that it is an unmerited punishment for her. In the conversations with the man of God she had come to a sense of her own unworthiness, to a knowledge of her transgressions; and she does not hesitate to attribute this affliction to her own sins. "Art thou come to me that my iniquities should be remembered?" It was the greatest punishment that the mother's heart could endure. The Sacred Narrative could not draw a sharper contrast between "the chosen people," who under the punishment of the drought—a well-merited punishment—daily grew more callous, and the king and his officials, as well as the queen, who were seeking the life of the Prophet. But here, in the home of the pagan woman, there is a recognition of the affliction as a just one, there is a bowing down of the head to the paternal Hand because there is a consciousness of guilt; although the guilt in the latter case is not in any way comparable to the guilt in the former. It is a wonderful confession, and on a wonderful occasion. In a word, in this one verse of the Sacred Narrative, we have a most wonderful

picture, a deeply painful contrast, a very sincere confession.

The Prophet, who in his own country had seen only the ingratitude of a stiff-necked people, the sinful vagaries of a weak-willed king, and the blasphemous ferocity of a strong-minded queen, could utter no word either of comfort or of consolation at this exhibition of a faith not inferior to his own—at least, to all appearances it was not unworthy to be likened to his own. The Chronicler gives the next act of this inspiring drama thus—"And Elias said to her: Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom and carried him into the upper chamber where he abode, and laid him upon his bed. And he cried out to the Lord, and said: O Lord my God, hast Thou afflicted also the widow, with whom I am after a sort maintained, so as to kill her son?"

The very idea that we should have expected to hear from the lips of the widow we now hear from the lips of His Prophet. There is no doubting the complaint made by Elias, and it does not seem out of place, for the Lord had sent him there to be the guest of this woman and it is during the time he remains under her roof that the greatest possible visitation comes. The same idea has taken possession of the man of God and the widow of Sarephta, namely, that the death of the boy is a punishment. The Prophet believes that his residence with the household has something to do with the unexpected taking away of the boy's life, whereas, the widow believed that it was a punishment for iniquities of her past life. The Prophet, however, has the deeper faith and the stronger confidence, for, after the first moments of confusion, he recollects himself, and with his usual zeal he proceeds to action. Unless he was confident that the Lord would work a miracle, he would never have taken the boy from the bosom of

his mother and, thereby, raised hopes in her motherly heart of some act by which her boy should once more be with her. It is true he made no promises, and he spoke no words, to her or to the assembled household; but his act is a sufficient guarantee that he would do all that was possible with the God of Israel that the charity and the faith of the widow should receive their reward in so far as that was possible in the present affliction.

Elias had been given the place of honor in the household and, as a consequence, he had as his sleeping-room the "upper chamber"; to it he carried the dead body of the boy, which he had reverently taken from the arms of the mother. Arrived in his little room, he laid the body "upon his own bed." And he, who thus far had been silent, wondering what might be the design of the Lord in this matter, began to speak to the Lord, and said—"O Lord my God, hast Thou afflicted also the widow, with whom I am after a sort maintained, so as to kill her son?" In the mouth of the Prophet there was now no complaining of the action of the Lord, but a kind of confused wonder why it should be so, especially as the occurrence should seem to be an act of punishment and, thus, should reflect on his presence in the household and, hence, indirectly, seem to reflect on the Lord himself, who had sent him there. Although these were not unexpected words for the occasion, nevertheless, the Prophet felt in his inmost heart that the Lord had some high, though hidden, purpose in this act.

What took place in that "upper chamber" is told in a simple manner by the Sacred Chronicler—"And he stretched, and measured himself upon the child three times, and cried to the Lord and said: O Lord my God, let the soul of this child, I beseech Thee, return into his body."

And the Lord heard the prayer of the man of God,

for the narrative continues—"And the Lord heard the voice of Elias; and the soul of the child returned into him: and he revived." It would be loss of time to discuss the question of the death of the boy having been a mere appearance of death and nothing more, so that a merely natural explanation of his reviving could be accepted. The narrative is too detailed on the matter to entertain even the probability of a temporary unconsciousness. What is always recognised as the all-sufficient sign of death is the parting of the soul and the body; this is plainly asserted—"let the soul of this child return to its body." And this was the second miracle that was performed by Elias in the house of the widow of Sarephta of the Sidonians.

CHAPTER XII

THE SON OF THE WIDOW OF SAREPHTA

In so far as we know, the miracle by which the Prophet called back the soul of the widow's son into his body is the first of its kind recorded in the Sacred Chronicles. For that reason alone we should expect to have a more minute, a more detailed, account of that stupendous event which happened in that "lonely upper chamber" in the city of Sarephta. Later on, we have the account of the miracle wrought by the successor of the Prophet when he recalled the flame of life to the body of the son of the Sunamitess. But, in the former account, we have not at all the detailed rendering of the scene that we have in the miracle of Eliseus. It is thus the Chronicler records the facts in the Fourth Book of Kings—"Eliseus therefore went into the house, and behold the child lay dead on his bed. And going in he shut the door upon him, and upon the child, and prayed to the Lord. And he went up and lay upon the child: and he put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he bowed himself upon him, and the child's flesh grew warm. Then he returned and walked in the house, once to and fro: and he went up and lay upon him: and the child gaped seven times, and opened his eyes." Whereas, in the first recorded miracle, we have the brief narration—"And Elias said to her: Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him into the upper chamber, where he abode and laid him on his own bed. And he cried to the Lord saying: O Lord my God, hast Thou afflicted also the widow, with

whom I am after a sort maintained, so as to kill her son? And he stretched, and measured himself upon the child three times, and cried to the Lord, and said: O Lord my God, let the soul of this child, I beseech Thee, return into his body. And the Lord heard the voice of Elias, and the soul of the child returned to him."

It would appear that each prophet had recourse to the Lord in his own characteristic manner. Eliseus, less enthusiastic than his master, paid all attention to the ritual of the solemn ceremony, and appears to have arrived at the final stage, piecemeal. Elias, as ever, goes straight to the heart of God. He may not have neglected any of the ritual necessary for the accomplishing of the work as a sacred ceremony, but he seems to throw all the force of his faith into those prayers that are a kind of accusation as well as a kind of supplication. We could not imagine Elias, in those earlier days, acting with the coldness and the precision of Eliseus; neither can we think of the disciple speaking with the fire and the burning faith of the master.

It was only to be expected that events of this kind should rivet the attention of the Fathers of the Church, and almost all commentators, on the signification of the ritual observed. Indeed, the event would have little value as a mere narration, were we to exclude its evident bearing on the things of the future. Were we completely to disregard the influence of such actions on the years that were yet to be, no complete idea of the mission, not to speak of the character, of Elias could be presented to our readers. His place, no matter how humble or how distant, in the plan of Redemption is of importance to everyone who has tried to study the career of "The Father and Founder of Christian monasticism."

Some commentators are of opinion that the same

ritual was observed by both prophets, and, consequently, that ritual had its value as a figure or type, especially in its ultimate value as a spiritual force, or as a necessary accompaniment to a spiritual force. The Old Testament is a mere shadowing forth of the things that were to come to pass in the New Dispensation. We have, then, according to some, in this miracle a shadowing forth of the great central fact of our Redemption, namely, the Incarnation of the Son of Man. Human nature, as it was before the coming of Christ, is well typified in the dead body of the child of the Sarephtan widow. The divine Personality coming down and, in a sense, accommodating itself to the lowliness of that nature, bestows wonderful prerogatives and privileges to which in itself it had not, could not have ever, any right. Between the type and the reality there is, undoubtedly, an infinite distance; nevertheless, the type prepares the mind for that which is to follow, particularly when we consider the lesson as being taught by God Himself. Others see in this miracle the recalling to life of the sinner who has lost grace through his own fault. The Priest, as the minister of the sacrament, breathes on the soul of the penitent the favor of the Lord, Who in His infinite mercy "stretches and measures Himself" on the spiritually dead body of the sinner. A Lapide gives no less than ten different explanations according to the various senses recognised in biblical exegesis.

In connection with this second miracle of Elias, there has grown up quite a number of surmises as to the subsequent career of this favored child. Already the Prophet had, indirectly, saved his life. We see that his mother did not expect that either she, herself, or her boy could escape the effects of the drought. She had informed the Prophet that she was gathering a few sticks to make a meal for herself and the boy, and that,

then, there was no hope of anything—save death. The Prophet, by making the cruse of oil inexhaustible and by multiplying the meal-supply, saved the life of the boy and the whole family, so that, indirectly, the boy owed his life to the Prophet. In the second miracle he owes his life directly to Elias, for this was the end in view when the Prophet besought the Lord for the miracle. Very naturally, around the life of one so favored of God, pious men would weave significant and interesting stories. Sometimes there is very good foundation for their pious narratives; but, at other times, there is only what they considered the just privileges for those thus chosen of God.

Saint Jerome seems to be very sure that this boy so favored by the Prophet was no less a personage than the great missionary sent, many years afterwards, to preach penance to the inhabitants of Nineveh. We may recall that the concluding words of the miracle-narrative are—"And Elias took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber to the house below and delivered him to his mother, and said to her: Behold thy son liveth. And the woman said to Elias: Now, by this I know that thou art a man of God; and the word of the Lord in thy mouth is true." Then we have, in the Fourth Book of Kings, the reference to Jonas, the prophet, who was sent to Nineveh—"Jonas, the son of Amathi, the prophet, who was of Geth, which is in Opher." From the first biblical quotation we have the fact that the widow believed Elias to be "the man of truth," and in the second we have it stated that Jonas was the son of Amathi, which is interpreted "truth"; consequently, the conclusion arrived at is that Jonas was the spiritual child of Elias, to whom, after his strange recall from death, the widow very freely committed the boy. It is, indeed, very natural that the boy should attach himself to the holy man

to whom he owed so much; it is very natural to suppose that the mother (noting the character of the woman as displayed in the Sacred Pages) should approve of the resolve of the boy to dedicate himself to one who was verily "the truth" of God. Then we have the additional fact that on Carmel, after the struggle with the false prophets, Elias had, as his attendant, a boy who was certainly in his permanent service. This boy is identified with the widow's son and, later, he becomes the prophet of the Gentiles.

This interpretation found high favor with Saint Jerome, who is certainly a great authority on such matters. He speaks of the relationship between the widow's son and the prophet Jonas as something quite certain. He, no doubt, was relying on the old traditions amongst the Hebrews, and these traditions were at one on the matter of the identity of the widow's son and Jonas. An interpretation of this kind was sure to find favor with the earliest commentators, although later authorities do not seem so favorable to the tradition.

The interpretation is certainly not without difficulties —and very serious ones, too. Jonas prophesied in the reign of Jeroboam the Second, who probably reigned for forty years, beginning about 783 B.C. The years of the reign of Achab, during which the miracle at Sarephta occurred, are generally given as between 876 B.C. and 854 B.C. It is apparent that the stretch of years is somewhat against the tradition. Nevertheless, it is not impossible that Jonas, who preached to the Ninevites, and the boy whom Elias recalled to life, should be one and the same person, for when the Lord wished to send a missionary to the evil city populated by Gentiles He would not select a young man, nay, rather He would select one whose age and appearance should make an impression on the hardened sinners of that great evil city.

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, and without doubt one of the most ancient and most extensive cities of those times. It stood on the banks of the Tigris and, thus, was the seat of a very lively commerce. Even in the days when Jonas was sent to preach to its citizens the population was very great, for we read that there were then in the city at least one hundred and twenty thousand children. If, then, we calculate the actual population from the statistics of the children, we need not fear to put the number at from six to seven hundred thousand people, at least. If we dare place confidence in the calculations given to us by more than one author, in regard to its dimensions, the population, as we have estimated it, will not seem out of place. Diodorus Siculus gives us the following dimensions, namely—one hundred and fifty stadia in length, ninety stadia in breadth, and four hundred and eighty in circuit. Its walls were a hundred feet high, and so broad that three chariots could drive abreast upon them. The towers for the defence of the city were two hundred feet high, and numbered nigh on fifteen hundred. No wonder that we find this great city called "the mistress of the East." It well deserved its appellation. It was to this city that Jonas was sent, and we may at once conclude that a missioner to such a city and such population must needs not be a young man. Aged as the widow's son of Sarephta should be, nevertheless, he does not seem an unlikely candidate for the mighty mission. The importance of the mission was not hidden from him, for he was very anxious to escape from its difficulties, and its trials, and its seeming hopelessness. This would lead us to the conclusion that the prophet was old enough to lose courage in the face of the responsibilities of the work.

Leaving aside for the moment any discussion in regard to the place of origin of the father of the boy mentioned

in the seventeenth chapter of the Third Book of Kings, and without any reference to his religion or to his race, we may repeat—what we have already said in regard to the race and religion of the widow of Sarephta, his mother—namely, that she was not an Israelite, neither in race nor religion. Nevertheless, the boy was, to all appearances, connected with the Gentiles, and his earliest years seem to have been spent in their associations. That he should ever have an interest in the Gentile people is a reasonable conclusion; and that he, better than one brought up in other surroundings, should have a good idea of the character and the natural propensities of a Gentile population, so as to be able to speak to them with an authority that, divine help apart, a stranger from a strange people could not possess—is likewise a reasonable conclusion. We may add that the life in Sarephta of the Sidonians must have had much in common with the life in Nineveh, although the populations of the cities could not be compared, as to numbers. In opposition to this aspect of the question, we have the reasons given by Saint Jerome why Jonas did not wish to be the bearer of the message of the Lord to the inhabitants of Nineveh. He asserts that Jonas objected to the mission because he saw in it the probability of the passing of the glory of the Israelitish people, believing, as he did, that the penance of the Gentiles should be the sign of the coming rejection, and so the ruin, of the chosen people and, consequently, the preaching of penance to the Ninevites should be too costly for him as a patriot—which, indeed, every Israelitish prophet was. This objection might not be so strong, if we were to advert to the fact that very often those who are only related partly to a nationality, or those who are called at the eleventh hour, are more patriotic and more zealous for the cause, and the nationality, than those who are

purely of the blood of the nation, or who have been born in the creed.

There seems, however, no reason to regard the words used in the Fourth Book of Kings, or in the Prophecy of Jonas, otherwise than as expressing facts, and, thus, they are in no way merely figurative, namely—"Now the word of the Lord came to Jonas, the son of Mamthi." The contents of this Book of the Prophecy of Jonas are regarded by the best authorities as true history and, thus, we must in the same way regard the information as to the parentage of Jonas. He was, consequently, of Geth Opher, in the tribe of Zabulon, and consequently of Galilee. It was not an unheard of thing that Israelites had married not only outside their tribe, but even outside the Hebrew people. The Gentile partners of marriages in such cases could become, by the legal ritual, members of the creed of Israel. So might it have been with the mother of Jonas.

The discussion as to the identity of the widow's son and the prophet who preached to the Ninevites has a peculiar interest for the student of the life of Elias, the Prophet of Carmel. One who had such a career of grace in his childhood cannot easily be relegated to the fate of those who have never received such great graces from Almighty God. One who in early life came under the influence of the fiery Prophet, whose words burned into the soul and whose life ceased not to charm his countrymen throughout the ages, could not have gone forth from the society of Elias to live the life of the ordinary man of the world of Israel. Those who admire the Prophet cannot resist the temptation to place all who came under his influence on a higher plane of spiritual life. There is absolutely no reason to doubt the tradition that makes the boy who served the Prophet on Carmel the son of the widow of Sarephta, but the tradition that identifies him with the prophet Jonas

cannot be regarded with the same plausibility, although in so far as we can judge there is no intrinsic impossibility, and we, certainly, do not think there is ground for any serious complaint if those who are admirers of the Prophet of Carmel exert themselves reasonably to identify them.

On the walls of the Catacombs in Rome we see the prophet Jonas issuing forth from the mouth of the whale, and we are told that this is a symbol of the Resurrection of Our Divine Lord from the dead. Not a few commentators have noticed that in the calling back to life of the widow's son of Sarephta there is also a kind of shadowing forth of the great event that is one of the foundations of our holy Faith. If we could pursue the idea further, we might say that the first type was a faint figure of the great Truth to which the three days in the whale's belly was a fuller and more expressive type. To unite the two symbols in the one person—and, above all, in him who owed his life to the fiery Prophet of Carmel—is a conception that admits no external want of harmony.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PROPHET MEETS THE KING

When we endeavor to ascertain how long the Prophet spent in the household of the widow of Sarephta, we are faced with the same difficulty that we have experienced when we discussed the time he spent in hiding at the torrent Carith. The Sacred Chronicler continues the narrative of the life of Elias thus—"After many days the word of the Lord came to Elias, in the third year, saying: Go and show thyself to Achab." We could only tell the exact period intended by the expression "many days," if we knew the exact time he spent in Carith. The mention of the "third year" does not present so much difficulty, for we can at least get an idea of what is intended.

The writers of the Sacred Narratives have a peculiar tendency to make an addition of "six months," although it is not quite certain that an exact period of "six months" is intended. We have in the First Book of Paralipomenon the statement that David reigned over Hebron seven years and six months—"So six sons were born to him in Hebron, where he reigned seven years and six months." Again, we find in the same Book, but in the last chapter—"And the days that he reigned over Israel, were forty years: in Hebron, he reigned seven years." It is just possible that as the six months are less than the year, as estimated by the Hebrews, it, as a period of time, may be eliminated in calculations where the time limit is only a secondary

element. The difficulty is, perhaps, more apparent than real, when we read the narrative as above stated and, then, the period of time allotted to the drought by Saint Luke, who cites the words of Our Lord—" there were many widows in the days of Elias, when heaven was shut up three years and six months "; and, again, in Saint James's Catholic Epistle—" Elias was a man passible like unto us : and with prayer he prayed that it might not rain upon the earth. And it rained not for three years and six months."

It will help to throw some light on the apparent discrepancy, if we recall that the Jews had two kinds of years, the civil and the ecclesiastical. The civil commenced with the month Tizri, because it was an old tradition that the world began at this particular time. The ecclesiastical year began with the month Nisan, the seventh of the civil year, which seems to correspond to the time of their departure from the bondage of Egypt. There were two names given to special years, one that commenced with the month Elul, when the tithes for the beasts were paid; the other began with the month Shebeth, because the tithes for the trees were then to be paid, as they were then budding. It would be very easy to imagine that a year might be calculated from the time of the failure in either of these years—even though the complete cycle of time had not been gone through. The same difficulty is to be found in the calculation of the days, where a certain period of a day, according to our mode of calculation, becomes a whole day—at least, so it is accounted. The Jewish mode of calculating the days, and the months, and the years, was not only different from our present system, but—and it is well to note it—that they themselves very often changed their methods of calculation; for instance, we read in Genesis—" In the six hundredth year of the life of Noe, in the second month, in the

seventeenth day of the month, all the fountains of the deep were broken up." The calculation was evidently based on the life of Noe. And, again, we have the same idea—"Therefore in the six hundredth and first year, the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were lessened upon the earth." Another and a new method of calculation is evident in the Book of Numbers, wherein we read—"And Aaron the priest went up into the mount Hor at the commandment of the Lord: and there he died in the fortieth year of the coming forth of the children of Israel out of Egypt." In later times the Hebrews seem to have followed the method of calculation in vogue in the lands to which they were subject.

It only remains to remark that when writers make an assertion—specially mentioning a period of time—in two different modes of expression it would not be unreasonable to suppose that they had different stretches of time before their minds. Whatever value in time we give to the "third year" of the Book of Kings, there is no reason why we should give any extra months to the same period expressed in different terms by another writer.

Those who have adopted the opinion that Elias remained for some reason at the torrent Carith for a couple of years at least, may readily appeal to the opening verse of the eighteenth chapter of the Third Book of Kings, for the contrast is there expressed between "the days" in Sarephta and "the years" of the water famine, even though the words are "after many days." We may, with a good deal of reason, conclude that the Prophet's sojourn in Sarephta was days, or months, but scarcely years, or even a year.

Samaria had begun to feel the drought in earnest, and the supplies from the outside world were not able to relieve the terrible afflictions of the people. During

all those weary years, the prophets of Jezabel had been supplicating their gods, but, evidently, all in vain, for the rain came not; neither did the dew fall. The struggle between the God of Israel and the gods of Tyre and Sidon was drawing to a conclusion, wherein defeat stared the false prophets in the face. The blessings of nature—which, they hitherto had maintained, came from the supplications to, and intercession of, Baal and Astarthe and the other gods—were now being withheld at the word of the Prophet who spoke in the name of the God of Israel. The issue was well known in Israel, and the people recognised it, too, and their minds began to revert to Him alone Who could give fertility to their fields and moisture to their throats.

In the midst of all the suffering, one figure stands out terrible and uncowed; there is one who will not admit defeat; there is one who believes in Baal and in Astarthe, despite their evident discomfiture; there is one who still threatens dire vengeance on the God of Israel and on all His prophets—and that one is Jezabel. True to the faith which she received from her father, true to the instincts of her fearless and brutal nature, she grows more audacious as the struggle between the gods of Tyre and Sidon and the God of Israel goes on, a struggle in which the pagan deities are worsted; but she tries to equalise the results by putting to death the friends of the God of Israel. She had, evidently, goaded her husband to the persecution of the Prophet who had announced the terrible famine. There seems no doubt that the intentions of the king in the beginning of the drought were malevolent in regard to the Prophet; but, as time went on and the terrible ravages of the water famine became more apparent, the courage of the king failed him, even under the pressure of the constant urging of the queen. He was looking for Elias throughout the land of Israel, although he was

not so certain as to his manner of acting when the Prophet was discovered. There was no doubting, however, what Jezabel would do, if she could succeed in finding the man of God—and no one knew that better than the king himself.

When the affairs of the kingdom of Israel had come to such a degree of misery that the very life of the nation was threatened, the king recognised the necessity of finding the Prophet and, either by threats or by persuasion, to induce the man of God to put an end to the drought—assured that he could do so. We know from the Sacred Pages that he was not content with seeking the Prophet throughout the land of Israel, but he also had recourse to the nations in the neighborhood, believing that the Prophet was in hiding outside the confines of Israel. It was, then, with good reason that the Lord had directed his servant to leave his hiding-place at the torrent of Carith, and, finally, had told him to seek safety in the city outside the confines of Israel. We can understand, in the light of the words of Abdias, why the Prophet sought the city of Sarephta, and why he was content that he should remain in the humble house of the widow of Sarephta, instead of carrying on his fiery mission of recalling the people to the service of the One true God, and thus laboring in Israel for his Master.

"As the Lord liveth, there is no nation or kingdom whither my Lord hath not sent to seek thee. And when all answered: He is not here, he took an oath of every kingdom and nation because thou wast not found." From these words we can easily arrive at the reason why even the secret places of Israel became no longer a safe retreat for the Prophet. In this vigorous search, and especially as the drought showed no signs of abating—nay, rather, showed every sign of increasing in fury—there was no secure hiding for the Prophet,

and when he went forth from the land of Israel he sought safety, not in the solitary places where he might be expected to have betaken himself, but he went to a city in which the authorities should not consider themselves under such great obligation to either the king of Israel, or to his wife, who was related by blood with the leading figures in the government of the cities of Tyre and Sidon. That the cities mentioned should do what they could to help in the capture of the fugutive who had made them suffer, though not to the extent to which he had made his own nation to suffer, is certain, especially as we know from the words of Abdias that the king had taken an oath from each of the powerful peoples in the neighborhood of Israel. In this vigorous search the king was at one with his fierce wife, though there is no question that they had different motives in the pursuit. Her motive was diabolical hate: his motive a combination of animosity and reverential fear.

The hate that the king had conceived in the beginning of the drought, against the man of God, had given place to a great terror lest he and his people should perish. The pursuit of the Prophet, important as it appeared to Achab in the first days of his affliction, became merged in a pursuit of the necessaries of life and, above all, of water. "And Achab called Abdias, the governor of the house," and said to him—"Go into the land unto all the fountains of waters, and into all the valleys to see if we can find grass and save the horses and the mules, and the beasts may not utterly perish." The search was to be a thorough one, and it is immediately clear that, had the Prophet remained either in the rocky sides of the Jordan or in the valleys, that were numerous where the tributaries flowed into the river, he could not have escaped the hands of the king, or of his governor, or of some of their minions, although the primary object of their search was not to make him

captive, but rather to find the water for the flocks and cattle and horses.

Achab knew that his prestige with the surrounding nations, which had not been so severely afflicted as Israel, depended on his army. And there were never wanting in those Eastern nations ambitious men who would seize on any opportunity to climb to the throne if only the hopeful occasion presented itself. With a people starving, and with a fast diminishing army, the plight of Achab was not an imaginary one. It would not have been for the first time—neither should it have been for the last—if one of the nations to the north, or to the south, of the kingdom of Israel, had directed a victorious army to exact tribute from, or to claim as a conquered part, the usually fertile valleys that lay between the Jordan and the Mediterranean. Hence, the pursuit of the Prophet had given way to the search —" to see if we can find grass, and save the horses and the mules "—for these animals must of necessity come first in the calculations of an Eastern potentate—never too sure of his throne. Amidst such pressing difficulties, it is no wonder that the mind of the king had undergone a change in relation to the Prophet. There was no change, however, in the mind of Jezabel, for her hate increased as the days went by, and, doubtless, she exerted every means to capture the author of the defeat of Baal and Astarthe—the gods of her fatherland. It was, indeed, during those days of trial that she had massacred all the followers of the prophets of the God of Israel. The writer of the events of those times tells us that Abdias hid quite a large number of the followers of the Lord—" when Jezabel killed the prophets of the Lord." The same idea is repeated later on, when the governor recalls to the attention of Elias—" Hath it not been told to thee, my lord, what I did when Jezabel killed the prophets of the Lord?"

It was not so much, then, from the anger of the king as from the fierce and unrelenting hatred of Jezabel that the Lord had to protect His messenger. Following the counsel of the Lord, the Prophet was able to pass in comparative safety and freedom the three years of the drought. But the time was at hand when it would be necessary to obey the Voice that had hitherto directed him, and to stand before the face of the enemy. Elias, who was unacquainted with the mind of the king, and being unable to distinguish between the motives of the pursuit of the king, on the one hand, and the queen, on the other, knew not what might happen at the interview which the Lord had commanded. Thusfar he had obeyed the Voice, and thusfar had always been preserved by the Lord, so he willingly complied with the command—"Go and shew thyself to Achab."

Elias had spent three years in solitude, in prayer and mortification. He, only in an indirect manner, shared in the afflictions of his nation; for the Lord, in His own designs, had decreed that His servant should be spared the horrors that were now the common lot of the Israelites. Wherever he went, the God of Israel made the burden of his daily wants very light, indeed. It would be a very great mistake to imagine that Elias did not share, in spirit, the afflictions of the people whom he loved, and of whom he was in a manner a minister. Men like Elias, who have left all in the service of a great cause, are not apt to take lightly the knowledge that others are suffering for the cause; it matters not whether the sufferings are inflicted justly or unjustly. Many a time in the rocky cell near the Jordan, and very often, too, in the lonely "upper chamber" in Sarephta, Elias had besought the Lord to lighten the afflictions of the people of Israel, even though no one knew better how well deserved those sufferings were; for he had seen the perfidy of the king

and of the people, and he knew how just was the anger of the Lord. There was one thing that characterised the prophets of the Old Testament, one and all, and that was a great and abiding patriotism. In fact, the prophets were the real and the constant patriots of Juda and of Israel. It has been remarked that the truest and the best panegyric of the prophets is—"Great was their fidelity and great the boldness of the prophets." They were not in any sense turbulent or fanatical agitators, as has been so often asserted. A weighty and important commission was theirs; and they performed it in a manner at once severe and equitable; if their words burned, it was with the fire of truth; if their threats terrified, it was the ghost of the evil done that aroused the fearful spectres in the culprits.

Whether in their sacred places in the cities or towns, or up in the mountain solitudes, the prophets could never forget that the one true God had spoken to the people from Sinai, and that He, himself, had pronounced from His own lips the Commandments of the Law. They never forgot that the great Leader, chosen of God, had always commenced his edicts with the impressive words—"Thus saith the Lord." In their sight, the Jewish monarch was only a viceroy, a kind of a worldly sign of the real power in heaven. Jahveh was their King as well as their God. Theirs was the mission to see that the people departed not from the Law, and that mission included the king and his court, even as it did the poorest of the people. The kings might betray the cause of the God of Israel, and the people might prove faithless to their sublime destiny; but the prophet never knew infidelity—as he never was conquered by fear; he never forgot the destiny of the people of God—just as he refused ever to lower the high standard of his own calling.

The pages of history cannot fellow the patriotism of

the prophets of Israel. The reason is at hand. They were ever with eyes directed aloft. Their Master was in heaven. The best and the bravest of earthly men could, and would, fail; hence, there was no one to take the place of the God of Israel. No king, no ruler, no tyrant, could ever claim the allegiance that was the due of the God of Israel. The line of demarcation of their patriotism was the line that separates the heavens and the earth. To them, suffering meant nothing, so long as it was for the cause of the God of Israel. For them, death was a blessing if it were undergone for the Master Whom they served. They loved Israel and they loved Juda because the God of their fathers had given these regions to a people whom the Lord had called the "chosen people." Notwithstanding all their transgressions, they knew that the Lord had loved their fathers; and the children of those fathers were still beloved by the God, Who in every age had exclaimed—"Hearken to My voice and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk ye in all the way that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you." Fidelity to Israel and Juda was fidelity to the one true God. Fidelity to the Law and the Traditions of Israel and Juda was fidelity to the Voice of the one true God. It was a patriotism at once heavenly and terrestrial, but with very little of the earth in it. It was a patriotism unique in the annals of ancient history, but to be met with at times in the ages after the Advent of the Saviour of the World.

The Prophet of Carmel was imbued with all the patriotic fervor that was characteristic of the class to which he belonged. He was prepared to do the Will of the Lord, no matter how difficult that Will was; nevertheless, it must have grieved his very soul to announce the terrible tidings committed to him by the Lord when he decreed the famine over Israel. During

the days when the famine had stricken the people of the land, no one could pity the unfortunate people more than the Prophet. And now, when he hears that the wrath of the Lord is about to be turned from the people of Israel, that once more the rain is to fall on the parched plains, that once more the dew is to fall from the heavens, he is filled with a great joy, because he sees in it a sign that the people are changed in heart towards the God of Israel. Although he must have had many and serious misgivings in regard to the future conduct of the king, yet his errand this time was one after his own heart. He was not sanguine that any change had been wrought in the wicked, vindictive heart of the king's wife; so it was not at all certain that he would emerge from the present contest with his life, even though, in so far as he could just for the present see, there was good news for the king and the people of Israel. The words were, then, sweet to his ear when the voice of the Lord announced to him—"Go and shew thyself to Achab, that I may give rain upon the face of the earth."

He gladly left the household of the widow of Sarephta of the Sidonians and travelled directly down to the land of Israel, making his way to the city of Samaria, believing that it was there he was to meet the king. The Lord had prepared in His own way the meeting, and the Prophet little thought of the mighty things that were yet to be done, ere the God of Israel had shown to His "stiff-necked" people that "the makers of idols are all of them nothing; and their best beloved things shall not profit them." The king, on his part, was no less glad once more to see him who had closed the heavens. Halting half-way between the God of his fathers and the gods of Jezabel, he had not the courage to do the right. Dominated by his masterful spouse, he had feared to act as his conscience

dictated. He was anxious to see the Prophet, because he saw in such meeting a solution of the terrible difficulties in which Israel stood. Hence, the meeting was, on each side, a joy that neither wished the other to know of; just as it contained elements of fear that each did not care to contemplate.

CHAPTER XIV

ABDIAS—THE GOVERNOR OF THE HOUSE OF ACHAB

The administration of the temporalities of the kingdoms of Juda and Israel must have been very much after the manner of the administration to be found in the neighboring nations. When the Lord gave to the Hebrew people the admonition—"And now, O Israel, hear the commandments and judgments which I teach thee; and doing them thou mayest live and entering in mayest possess the land which the Lord the God of thy fathers will give you"—it did not follow that the obligations and the duties attendant on the administration of the temporal affairs of the people were in any way diminished. The Levitical law undoubtedly gave a certain color to the legislation left free by the highest authorities, and we may reasonably suppose that the officials, especially in the selection and nomination of them, were not entirely outside the purview of the theocratic spirit which found its fullest expression on Sinai. Long before the reign of Achab, "the princes of the tribes" and "the heads of the families" had been to a great degree converted into "captains of thousands" and "hundreds"; for the Hebrew people, although they had entered into the Land of Promise, were still fighting for their existence, and, alas! too, at times they were engaged in fratricidal war! Hence, the nature of government must of necessity have been influenced by the conditions in which the people then found themselves.

In the reign of King David, according to the Second

Book of Kings, the officials who carried on the offices of government were "the Captain of the Hosts, the Captain of the Royal Body-guard, the Recorder, the Secretary of State (at least, so we may term him for the present), the Official for attending to the Revenue, and lastly, the Priests." It might not be so easy to properly describe the individual duties of each of those functionaries, nevertheless, from time to time, we may gain a little information on the duties of some of them from the same inspired source. No doubt, many of these, but not all, were modelled on the officials of the governments of the larger and more successful neighboring kingdoms. Later on, in the reign of Solomon the son of David, we notice that the number of the officials is increased, and that the nature of the functions of each is better understood. According to the Third Book of Kings, we find necessary for the carrying on of the government the following:—"And these were the princes he had: Azarias, the son of Sadoc the Priest. Elihoreph, and Ahia, sons of Sisa, scribes: Josaphat, the son of Ahilud, recorder: Banaias, son of Joiada, over the army; and Sadoc and Abiathar, priests. Azarias, the son of Nathan, over them that were about the king: Zabud, the son of Nathan the priest, the king's friend. And Ahisar, governor of the house; and Adoniram, the son of Abda, over the tribute. And Solomon had twelve governors over all Israel who provided necessaries, each man his month in the year." We may freely accept this later and fuller list as the officials who were managing affairs in the court of Achab and Jezabel.

The introduction of Abdias into the stirring tragedy of the people of Israel in the days of Elias, the Prophet, is very simple, although very forceful, and, at first sight, we are not prepared to find any difficulties either in the nature of his office or in the subsequent

career of the man. The narrative of the appearance of Abdias is as follows—" and there was a grievous famine in Samaria. And Achab called Abdias, the governor of his house. Now Abdias feared the Lord very much. For when Jezabel killed the prophets of the Lord he took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifty and fifty in a cave and fed them with bread and water." We have, here, several facts briefly stated : the first of which we have received full knowledge—namely, that there was a grievous famine in Samaria; the second, that an officer named Abdias was the governor of the house of King Achab; and the third, that he was a faithful child of the Law and the Traditions, for he risked his life to aid the persecuted followers of the God of Israel. The second statement brings us face to face with a rather important difficulty, for we are inclined to make Abdias hold the office which is assigned in the above list of officials in the reign of Solomon to Ahisar who, from the nature of his duties, must have been a close friend of the monarch. If, then, Abdias was in such intimate relations with King Achab, it is difficult to reconcile his religious zeal with the meanness and treachery shown by the king. If we advert to the mission imposed upon him by the king, we find that he is performing the duties assigned to the twelve governors whose care was to furnish the royal household with the necessaries of life, month by month. What appears to us as the more satisfactory solution of the difficulty is to regard Abdias as one of the twelve governors, and that his month of office began with the commission given him by the king, namely—" And Achab said to Abdias : Go into the land unto all the fountains of waters, and into all the valleys, to see if we can find grass, and save the horses and mules, that the beasts may not utterly perish." Except for the time of his office, he would be at liberty to attend to other matters, amongst which

was evidently the care of the faithful prophets of the Lord during the persecution of Jezabel. The governors who supplied the royal household, although they might not be so intimately concerned in the affairs of the domestic life of the monarchs, were, however, men of great influence in the kingdom. We read of some of them being united in wedlock with members of the royal family—" Benhesed to whom belonged all Nehhath-Dor, he had to wife the daughter of Solomon " and, in the same way, Achimaas of Nephtali was the husband of Basemath, a child of the royal house.

The Chronicler of the Book of Kings refers to Abdias as the " governor of the house of Achab," and it would appear that he uses the title in its strict sense; hence, we shall adhere to tradition that gives him the office which must have made his life not only very irksome, but at times very perilous, for one so constituted in attachment to the Law and the Traditions of Israel. Those who would identify the " Captain of the fifty," sent with Abdias, in the reign of King Ochosias, to arrest the Prophet, could not very well hold this opinion, even though it might be conceded that very often friends of the kings of Israel were wont to perform offices for their masters which were not in strict accord with their rank. Abdias, as " governor of the house of Achab," could hardly be one with a " Captain of fifty "—a title well-defined and recognised as being less honorable than other titles more likely to be assumed by one who was, or had been, " a governor of the king's house."

We need not consider for the present whether the king had chosen Abdias because of his well-known friendship with the followers of the Prophet who had pronounced the curse over the land of Israel—a not improbable consideration, owing to the straits to which

the kingdom was reduced and the necessity of placating, in some way, the powers obedient to the behest of Elias. The duty to which Achab called the governor of his house was an all-important one—"Go into the land unto all the fountains of waters, and into all the valleys." The mission was to save the horses and the mules, upon which the prestige of Israel as a fighting nation depended. If there were another intention on the part of the king in sending the governor of his house, it is not so stated, although it might be aptly implied. The mission was, indeed, in any aspect, of the greatest importance, for it was a kind of sharing the royal authority with one who was a subject and not of the royal house—"And they divided the countries between them that they might go around them: Achab went one way, and Abdias went another way by himself."

The weakness so apparent in Achab when action was demanded does not appear in his judgment, for he had chosen the best officer in his kingdom. Committing one half of the kingdom to the governor of his house could easily be regarded as a dangerous expedient. Not seldom did the sharer in royal honors accept such office with the hope that it might lead to further honors, and even to the throne itself; not seldom did the royal giver repent of his generosity, and then the head of the ambitious officer paid the penalty, because the king had conceived that he was a possible competitor for the throne. With Abdias it was merely a share in the dangers of the kingdom, and there was not the slightest ambition in the man for other honors. He was, in a way that neither he nor the king understood, an instrument of the God of Israel for the relief of the famine-stricken land. The Lord had said to Elias—"Go shew thyself to Achab." There is no mention of an intermediary. That Abdias had been assigned the

northern part of the kingdom, in which was situated the city of Sarephta, where Elias was sojourning until he received the message from the Lord, was not by mere chance or accident. All the circumstances considered, we cannot but be very deeply impressed as to the manner in which the Prophet and the king meet for the second interview. It shows most clearly that it was no mere chance ending of the pursuit. The impression that it made upon Achab was not lost—so much may be noticed in the subsequent events. If the king had conceived that his threats, or the threats of his wife, had made the Prophet a coward, he now knew that he had been mistaken. Unbidden, he had entered the presence of the king, when he was about to announce on the first occasion the message of the Lord; but now when the anger of the king is well known, and when all are aware of the murderous hatred of Jezabel, the Prophet comes into the presence of the king, announced by royal herald. The scene is inspiring. He will not go to seek the king, because he is greater than the king, for he is the messenger of the King of kings. If Achab wants to see him, he must come to him; the tables are turned, apparently, although the timorous could see, in the meeting, nothing but death for the Prophet.

"Go and tell thy master"—here the inference is written large by the words that follow—"Elias is here." Thus, if the king wishes an interview, he knows where to obtain it. Elias would speak to him in the parched fields, under the burning sky, where the hot winds blew and the air seemed afire. It was in the midst of that deadly-distressed and famine-ridden region, the witness of the power of the God of Israel, the testimony of the inefficacy of any intercession on the part of the gods of heathendom—it was in the field of the triumph of the one true God, and the place of the acknowledged defeat of the gods of Tyre and Sidon,

that this interview must take place. If the king wished for the interview, he could have it—but the Prophet alone was the person to declare the conditions. "Go tell thy master: Elias is here." This was the order, and these were the conditions, and the one and the other were declared by him who was the victor.

Hardly sufficient comment has been made on the title that Elias gave to King Achab, namely—"thy master." It would not be the first time that the servants of God had made and unmade kings. Achab might be the master of Abdias and of many in Israel, but it was for the Prophet to say whether he was king or not. His conduct had not given evidence that he was the proper representative of the God of Israel, Who had first claim on the children of the "chosen people." And, when the king had received the message from his governor, it must have shaken the little confidence that yet remained to the weak-willed and vacillating husband of Jezabel. He was under no mistake, for he now knew that it was the word of Elias that had closed the gates of heaven, so that neither rain nor dew fell, and he well knew that he, who had displayed such power, could declare his throne had passed to another. Achab was, indeed, a wise ruler, according to the world's estimate, but the fact is, he did not know how to rule Israel; and, although he had given way to the strong influence of his wife, he was not ignorant of the history of the people of God, and of their kings. If the Prophet continued to call him "Master," then he could reckon that his days as king had been numbered. The stage had evidently been arranged by Providence—and the players did only the parts assigned to them. The opening of this dramatic interview could scarcely be conceived in circumstances more apt to impress on the mind of the reader the greatness of the divine conception, as displayed in human affairs, and the poor

pawns that creatures make in the mighty game, wherein men try to outwit the living God.

It has been asserted, and with some reason, too, that Abdias was a disciple of the Prophet. In our opinion, his becoming one of the prophets must have been after the meeting with Elias in northern Samaria, although there is nothing very improbable in the assertion that he was one of the group of men who praised God in the same manner that the prophets in the earlier years of the kingdom of Israel were wont to do. That he was already initiated into the order of prophets, as founded by Elias, and as conceived by the early Christian writers to be the real founders of the monastic life, does not appear to us tenable. The occupation in which we find him at the period, and the fact that Elias speaks to him as a stranger, supports our opinion; indeed, he was so little known to the Prophet that it was necessary to recount the works he had done for the prophets of the Lord during the persecution of Jezabel. These added to other facts not to be questioned convince us that he was not a follower, at least thus far, and in the strict sense, of the real founder of the monastic life. As we have seen to have happened in the case of "the widow's son," so a wealth of legend and story has grown around the name of Abdias—justly so, we may remark, for he seems to have been a character destined for a great work in the preparation for the times of the Messias. We may not be strongly convinced by those old Hebrew traditions which have crept into the writings of the early Fathers of the Church, and have retained a place in all the writings of the Rabbis; nevertheless, there is much in them that is beautiful, and so much that seems to be in accordance with facts that they are really worthy of mention in any serious work on the great Prophet of Carmel.

In the catalogue of the Saints recognised by the Church, we have the name of Abdias. His feast is celebrated on the nineteenth of the month of November. Saint Jerome, identifying this Saint with the governor of Achab, remarks that he, who fed an hundred prophets in the days of Elias, now feeds the faithful of the Church, and adds that he, who acted under the guidance of Elias, now acts under the kindly care of the Church. He had received the prophetic gifts from the leader of the band of the prophets because he had not forgotten "the sons of the prophets" when they were in need. In the time of Saint Jerome his tomb, with those of Saint Eliseus and the Baptist, was to be pointed out in Sebaste, which is the modern name of Samaria. His association with Eliseus is easily understood, for he lived beyond the time when the great Founder of the monastic life was taken up into heaven in the fiery chariot. This tradition mentioned by the Saint was common amongst the Hebrew writers and was continued in the early years of the Church.

That he merited a place amongst the prophets, no one can doubt who reads the Third Book of Kings; and that he equally deserves mention in the annals of the Church is undeniable. Elias is called the "Founder of the monastic life"; hence, all who helped him in his struggle with the powers in Israel contributed to the conservation of an institution that has not rarely contributed life and vigor to the New as well as the Old Discipline. It must have been known fairly well amongst the friends of the God of Israel that the governor of the king was a faithful follower of the traditions of the people; although his benefactions to the prophetic band could not, neither dare they, be so well known—at least, at the time. "Hath it not been told thee, my lord, what I did when Jezabel killed the prophets of the Lord: how I hid a hundred men of

the prophets of the Lord by fifty and fifty in caves and fed them with bread and water?" We may pass over the discussion that has arisen as to the meaning of the word "prophet." It really does not matter whether they were prophets in the real sense of the word, and as now understood, or whether they were really good men who lived according to the traditions of Israel, and who, as such, were stumbling-blocks in the way of the king's wife, as well as being a reproach to the life of the king himself. The fact remains that the governor of Achab did a courageous thing, as well as an act of charity. He knew the penalty, if he had been taken in his efforts to thwart the commands of the wicked queen. The days during which he had performed those works of charity, and those acts of mercy, were rather critical times. The water was scarce, and the famine incidental to the shortage of water had begun to make itself felt even in the king's household. There is only one reading that can be put upon the narrative, and it is—that Abdias had obtained the water and the bread from the husbanded stores of the king. He had not scrupled at this seeming fraud practised for the good of the prophets, because he saw at the queen's table the crowds of the false prophets who, despite the prevailing want, had everything they could desire, although they were participators in the very crimes that had brought the malediction of the God of Israel on the land of Samaria. As a true child of Israel, he knew that the tithes of the people, and their taxes, and all else which the kingly household obtained from the people, were the property of the God of Israel, rather than the property of the king, even under circumstances more favorable than the present. He knew the prophetic doctrine that the king was only a kind of viceroy; and that dearer to the heart of Jahveh were the men who had been true to His law and His traditions.

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Abdias knew more of the power and the strength of Elias than the Prophet knew of him and his past—"And as Abdias was in the way Elias met him. And he knew him, and fell on his face and said: Art thou my lord Elias?" The Prophet had received his instructions in Sarephta "to shew himself to the king"; hence, in his travel to stand before the face of Achab, he found no interest in the meeting with Abdias and the men who accompanied him. He knew, apparently, nothing of the governor of Israel. On the other hand, he was evidently well known to the governor, who, before the present meeting, had on several occasions seen him; especially he could not forget the man of God who had thundered the truth into the ears of King Achab three years before. Travel-stained and weary as the Prophet was from the journey, and likewise suffering from the effects of the drought, he was at once recognised by Abdias, who saluted him, calling him "lord." The question he asks is merely an address of courtesy to one whose powers he knows and dreads Be it noted, he did not ask—"Art thou Elias?" but he carefully added—"Art thou my lord Elias?"—thereby paying due deference to the man of God. He was an official of the king; and, consequently, might reasonably be accounted the enemy of one whom the king and his household had declared an enemy. Abdias had no part in the treachery of his royal master.

At once, the Prophet saw the design of the Lord, and he immediately acted according to the light vouchsafed to him. His mission was to see, and talk with, Achab; and now he insists that this officer of the king be his messenger to his master. Out of courtesy, he answers the question of Abdias, and then adds—"Go and tell thy master: Elias is here." But Abdias knew enough of the wondrous powers of the men of God, and especially of the remarkable gifts of Elias. He was well

aware of what Achab would desire him to do under the circumstances—namely, to arrest the Prophet and bring him in as prisoner into the presence of the king. Abdias had no belief in such a measure, knowing that at one word from the Prophet all the precautions likely to be taken should be useless. Were he to return to the king with the information that he had seen the Prophet, but had been afraid to act, he could make no mistake as to the fate that should await him. The dilemma in which he found himself was a very difficult one. Elias had every interest to avoid the meshes of the king. Abdias had no confidence in the mercy, or reason, of his master—above all, when under the influence of his wife—hence, the reasoning of the governor was, according to the dictates of ordinary worldly wisdom, sound—namely, the best thing Elias could do was to fly the face of his declared enemy. That he could do so, if he wished, and in spite of every precaution that he, or the king, or anyone else, could take, was a foregone conclusion in the mind of Abdias. That it would be wise to do so, appeared to him the only safe conclusion; hence, when Elias told him to go and tell his master that he, Elias, was awaiting him in that place, the governor believed that on his return there would be no Elias to receive the king—and then his own death should follow.

"Now thou sayest to me: Go and tell thy master: Elias is here. And when I am gone from thee, the spirit of the Lord will carry thee into a place that I know not of; and I shall go in and tell Achab and he not finding thee, will kill me." The philosophy of the governor comes to the aid of his commonsense. He knows that on no account should the Prophet show himself in the presence of the king. He has heard of the disappearance of the Prophet, time and again, during the years of the drought, believing that in each

disappearance the event was carried out by a strictly supernatural agency. Many were the incidents related of the Prophet during the days of the drought—it is ever so in times of great crisis, in regard to the chief actors, that wondrous stories arise and are seldom questioned. The simple faith of the governor accepted all, well aware of the character of the man of God and conscious of his power with the God of Israel. It seems quite reasonable that, even if Elias should wish to present himself in the presence of the king, the Lord would not permit it and would take him away from the place, as often happened before, according to all rumors. Abdias also shrank from being the intermediary in a transaction that must, as he believed, end in the death of the Prophet, should Elias persist in his resolution to meet the king; and in any such tragedies, wherein the prophets figured, he had no desire to have any part.

The Prophet began to see the reasoning and to recognise the motives of the messenger of the king, especially when he told him in all simplicity that—"thy servant feareth the Lord from his infancy." He had been true to the traditions of Israel. He was one of those who had never bowed the knee to Baal. Placed in the high and dangerous position of governor to the weak King Achab, he had not consented to do those things which so many of the Israelites had done. He was, it is true, the servant of King Achab and of his wife, Jezabel, but he had never followed them in their treachery to the God of Israel. He had retained the confidence of the nation, not by any slavish following of the corrupt manners of the court, or by imitating the weaknesses of the people; so he could, in the presence of the man of God, make a declaration of the faith of his lifetime. Stern and fiery as the Prophet was, he could not refrain from showing to this servant

of the one true God some little appreciation for a noble life well spent. It would surely redound to his credit if he were to bring to the king the announcement of the presence of Elias in the land of Samaria; and, above all, if he should be the medium of the king having an interview in which the drought should be taken from the land, all must feel grateful to him.

He did not deceive the Prophet by his reiteration of the fear for his own safety—"And now thou sayest: Go and tell thy master: Elias is here: that he may kill me." He, who had risked death so often in the time of real danger—namely, when Jezabel was in pursuit of the prophets of the Lord—could scarcely fear death when the interests of Israel were of utmost importance. Great as his devotion to the king was, yet greater far must have been his devotion and his reverence for him who typified all that was best in the prophetic life, and who was practically the first of a new line of holy men who should plead for, and struggle for, the land of Israel and the chosen people.

We may take it for granted that Abdias was full of anxiety for the man of God. He had no desire to see him in the presence of the king. He knew the ideas that animated the queen; and he could not rely on the king. He, practically, gave to the Prophet all the information that a wise and prudent man required, to gauge how the future must be if he fell into the hands of his enemies. He knew that Elias could escape, and that he ought to escape. His suggestion as to the taking away of the Prophet by some supernatural agency, when he was on the way to the king, was only a hint to the man of God how things could be explained. We do not for a moment doubt that Abdias was prepared to take the consequences.

This explanation seems to have escaped most of the commentators; but the keener and the more profound

the study that is imported to the incidents in this chapter of the Third Book of Kings the more strongly will this solution commend itself to the student of the life of the Prophet. It gives us an extra interest in the life of Elias; and it gives us a clearer insight into the impression that the fiery soul of the Prophet made on all to whom he spoke, and on all with whom he had any dealings.

Saint Jerome, in his introduction to the Book of the Prophecy of Abdias, is insistent on the Hebrew tradition that the governor of Achab is the writer of the Prophecy mentioned under the name Abdias. Authorities have not, however, taken kindly to the tradition which the Saint has accepted. The dates are in conflict, and the writer of the Prophecy lived not only many, many years after the time usually allotted to the governor of Achab, aye, even hundreds of years—such is the opinion of many biblical critics. There does not, however, seem any convincing reason for accepting the dates offered by these latter critics. We can, without doing any very great violence to our reasonable deductions, find dates for the governor and the writer of the Prophecy which would not present insuperable obstacles to their being one and the same person. The general opinion is that Abdias, whose name signifies "the servant of the Lord," prophesied about the time of the lesser prophets, Osee and Joel. Some give his years as about 845 B.C., which makes his Prophecy apply to the things that occurred before and during the time of Joram. The question is of deep interest to biblical students, but we may content ourselves with noticing the relation between the name given the prophet—namely, "the servant of the Lord"—and the office which Abdias of the time of Elias held for the king, not forgetting, of course, the deeds he performed for the men of God who were in hiding. Abdias, in

whatever capacity we view him, was truly a "servant of the Lord."

The question in regard to the identity of the writer of the Prophecy of Abdias and the "governor of the house of Achab" we, willingly, confess we are not prepared to solve in a manner satisfactory either to ourselves or to our readers. The former supposition which makes the captain of fifty, who was sent to arrest Elias, one with the former "governor of the house of Achab" does not find favor with us. The leader of the soldiers on that occasion was named, without any qualification, a "captain of fifty"; consequently, it seems natural enough that his rank was as mentioned. Abdias was something more than a "captain of fifty," if he was not still one of the principal men of the kingdom. It might be advanced in favor of the supposition that, the two former "captains of fifty" having proved failures, the king should naturally be driven to find someone who must find favor in the eyes of the Prophet. Manifestly, we are compelled to infer there were not such signs of intimacy between the Prophet and the "captain" of the third fifty as should have been between one of the fervent disciples of the man of God and him who was his inspiration. We believe it far more acceptable that "the governor of the house of Achab" should end his days in a manner more in keeping with his previous life, as declared by himself to the Prophet; hence, it appears far more in accord with the facts that he should be found amongst the actual followers of the Prophet when he had instituted the newer life (the more perfect life of the *filii prophetarum*). This latter opinion would make the former one almost impossible—namely, that as captain of soldiers in actual service he could be a prophet in the new institution of Elias, which in the reign of Ochosias was already founded and flourishing.

One other legend remains to be mentioned, and the origin of it is largely due to the commentaries of the Rabbis. Naturally, the Jewish mind lingers lovingly around the life of their great Prophet. Anything that can contribute to his honor is never found wanting in their writings. In the days of the active ministry of Eliseus, the successor of Elias, it is related that—"a certain woman of the wives of the prophets cried to Eliseus saying: Thy servant my husband is dead, and thou knowest that thy servant was a just man and one that feared the Lord." To this widow the prophet showed himself singularly kind and beneficent, so that she was able to pay her debts and get back her sons who had been taken from her because of that debt. Some have surmised that, in reality, the prophet was only paying back a little of what was due to the widow of him who had done so much for the prophets of the Lord in the dark days of Jezabel. More aptly does the legend apply to the husband of the Sunamitess who received from Eliseus a similar gift to that received by the widow of Sarephta from the great Prophet himself, namely, the restoration to life of her dead child. The facts connected with the miracle of Eliseus no doubt lend themselves to the formation of a legend pleasing enough to one who is not too critical. It is thus told—"And there was a day when Eliseus passed by Sunam: now there was a great woman there, who detained him to eat bread." Not content with this kindness, she said to her husband—"I perceive that this is a holy man of God. Let us therefore make him a little chamber and put a little bed in it for him, and a table and a stool, and a candlestick. And when he cometh to us he may abide there." For this charitable act the prophet determined to supplicate the Lord for a gift for the Sunamitess. Although far advanced in years, and until then childless, a son was born to her. The

son died, but by the powerful intercession of the prophet he was restored to life. In after years he warned this widow of a coming famine; evidently, her husband was not at the time a member of the household, for only she and the son are mentioned. It would appear that the husband was dead, or had gone to adopt the stricter life then instituted by the prophet, who would not allow any actual and continued ties of the domestic life amongst his new brethren—"And Eliseus spoke to the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying: Arise, and go thou and thy household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst find: for the Lord hath called a famine, and it shall come upon the land seven years." The probability of the legend is enhanced by the fact that she seems to have had a special claim on the king and nation. When she returned from exile in the land of the Philistines, she asked the king for her inheritance, and the king gave her what she demanded. Thus, there was a double debt to her—one on the part of the prophet, the other on the part of the nation.

CHAPTER XV

THE CHALLENGE OF THE PROPHET

The settled determination of the Prophet to see the king, and to speak with him, was very evident to the governor of the house of Achab. His well-intentioned hints to the man of God, and his veiled insinuations, had no interest for the one who had received all his instructions from the God of Israel, and who was consequently fearless as to what men might or could do. The interview was cut short in the words that reminded the governor of a scene that thrilled the heart of everyone present a little more than three years before—"And Elias said: As the Lord liveth before Whose face I stand, this day I will show myself to him." These were the words with which the Prophet had added sanction to the message he delivered to Israel and its king in the palace of Samaria. The verity of that first message no man dare dispute; the awful fulfilment of every detail in the chastisement of Israel was staring men in the face even when "the governor" and the man of God stood disputing in the parched and arid plains of Samaria. Whatever might have been the anxiety of the messenger of the king in regard to the future, he was quite satisfied when he heard the solemn affirmation of Elias that the success of the future lay in the hands of the Prophet. Somewhat of the resolution of the one passed into the soul of the other, for we read—"Abdias therefore went to meet Achab and told him." To be the herald of Elias at such time, and on such occasion, was an honor that the faithful son of Israel appreciated. Rejoicing he made his way, and evidently the explanation which he gave to the king

made a deep impression on him, for without loss of time he hastens to meet the Prophet.

"And Achab came to meet him"—this was the first declaration of defeat on the part of the king. It was a humiliating for him, the king of Israel, to go in person to meet Elias—one who had been in hiding for several years. Had there been any way out of this meeting, most assuredly Achab should not have wended his way to where his presence proclaimed to all Israel his former infidelity to the traditions of his fathers, and his present anxiety to escape the punishment which his treachery deserved.

Had Achab been a strong character fighting for a cause that, in his heart, he knew could never ultimately triumph, he would have seized on this opportunity to make a real confession of his errors, and to gain as a friend the man who had so evidently wielded a power, without which no king had ever successfully ruled the "chosen people." Achab was weak-willed and now, in his hour of defeat, he is incapable of any generous declaration of his sins and, consequently, he grows peevish and petulant—"And when he had seen him he said: Art thou he that troublest Israel?" It was a very puerile question to ask, after all his back-sliding; it was a weak introduction to an interview which was destined to be of much moment to himself and to Israel. No sorrow for his abandoning the God of Israel; no regret for the temples of the false deities which had arisen on the high places of the land of "the chosen people"; no acknowledgment of his betrayal of the trust imposed upon him when he was anointed king of Israel; no purpose of amendment, so as to gain the favor of the powers that had taught him such a lesson.

The insolent question asked by the king gave Elias the very opening that he sought. No one, and especially a man of the type of Achab, could afford to be

insolent to Elias. As usual, the Prophet did not waste time in any address to the king; neither did he lose time in the wonted courtesy shown to royalty on such occasions. He, at once, proceeded to the burning question at the root of all the present misery in the land—"I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, who have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and followed Baalim." The king understood the reference to his father, for, as we have written elsewhere, it is said of him—"And Amri did evil in the sight of the Lord and acted wickedly above all that went before him." Amongst the wicked acts of Amri was his alliance with the house of the king of Sidon, for it was he who betrothed his son, Achab, to the daughter of the king of Sidon, who was likewise a priest of the false gods. This was the first step in the spiritual ruin of Israel, a ruin that has not often been equalled even in the history of that ungrateful people. The father began, but the son continued; and the present punishment was the result of the repeated infidelities on the part of the king; the culminating crime being the appearance of the king on the altars of the gods of Tyre and Sidon.

The king essayed no answer to the direct and merciless statement of the Prophet. It was useless to argue against one who had the facts in his favor. It was useless to put on an appearance of bravery which he did not, and could not, feel it in his heart. He knew he was a defeated man. He knew every word that the Prophet had said was true. His arrogance then disappeared and his only anxiety was to know the easiest terms which the man of God would accept, so that Israel might be free from the terrible drought.

Elias had given answer sufficient to the false charge of the king, and he was not inclined to lose time in useless argument with this man, for whom he could

have no respect. The time was critical; and the pass to which things had come was too terrible to squander that time in talk with the real culprit. Elias cut short all discussion by his challenge, which must have made the king aware that the time for trifling had passed—"Nevertheless send now, and gather unto me all Israel, unto Mount Carmel: and the prophets of Baal, four hundred and fifty: and the prophets of the groves four hundred, who eat at Jezabel's table."

Naturally, all Israel could not be present, neither did the man of God desire to have them all there; but he wished to have, at least, so many that the facts, which were about to take place on Carmel, must never be a subject of doubt. The news of this challenge was sure to bring as many as could come; and from all the neighboring places. After the three years' drought, the question was the most vital subject that could occupy the minds of those chastened people. They were in fear of the king, who was a traitor to the cause of the land of Israel. They were in dread of Jezabel, who had shown to them that she, at least, refused to acknowledge the God of Israel; and she was ever on the war-path for the honor of her father's gods, and feared not to shed the blood of those who refused to bow the knee to them. In all probability, the heart of the people would ring true when it came to a definite decision as to who should possess their homage; but to all intents and purposes they were attached to the gods of Tyre and Sidon. Elias rightly stated the position, when he asked them later on—"Why halt between two sides?" We do not for a moment believe that there were wanting many brave and honest souls, like the governor Abdias, who, in private life, did everything required by the law, but, in public, could not flout the opinions and the seeming beliefs of the king and the queen.

We are not aware of how many hours, or days, were allowed by the Prophet for the assembling of the people, but, in so far as we can judge, the time was not long. The merest intimation of the great duel that was to take place between Elias and the false prophets was sufficient to draw crowds to the Mount of Carmel. It was, evidently, not of duration sufficiently long to attract the attention of the queen, Jezabel. Judging by her character and her vindictive spirit, especially towards Elias, she would not have absented herself on the occasion. It seems very probable that the king, Achab, did not leave the place to go back to his palace. Hence, we can, with a good deal of probability, presume that the time of all the occurrences at this famous duel would not take more than three days, if even so long.

Elias specially mentions four hundred of the prophets of Baal and four hundred and fifty of those who ate at Jezabel's table. We do not think that these were all that were in the land of Israel. In fact, we are of opinion that the numbers mentioned were just such as could be gotten together at the short notice given by the Prophet. Surely they were in numbers sufficient to represent the false gods who had brought the malediction on Israel through the favor of Jezabel and the king. The commentators make the division of these prophets thus: the four hundred allotted to the service of Baal belonged to the king, but the four hundred and fifty of the prophets of the grove were the particular friends of Jezabel. By the word "Baal" is intended the many gods worshipped in the cities of Israel; then, in addition, there were the many gods who received adoration in the high places, and in the rustic solitudes, throughout the land—these were called of Astarthe. Hence, the names used here are only names signifying pagan deities in a generic way. It would, indeed, require a long list to enumerate the various deities, and

the many aspects under which they were the subject of the people's worship. From the situation of Samaria, and, indeed, the cities of Israel generally, there were many groves and so-called high places; hence, it would not be a very difficult matter to summon in a short time several hundred of these false prophets, who lived in communities, and much after the same manner of life as the prophets of the God of Israel. That is always the method practised by the powers of evil—to imitate, at least externally, the things to which they are most opposed.

It would seem from the sacred text that Achab accepted the challenge almost at once. Some of the commentators hold that quite a long discussion took place between the Prophet and the king, but, if so, we know nothing of it; neither have we any guarantee that it should be so, even though we admit that it is not an unlikely opinion. One thing is certain: the king was not over-anxious to talk with the Prophet, recognising, as he did, that facts were against him, and that no long-sustained conversation could exonerate him from the charges that the Prophet had made, and for which he had been tried and found guilty by the God of Israel. It is far more probable that Achab, seeing in the challenge a way out of his difficulties with the Prophet, and at the same time with the queen, eagerly seized on the proposal. It was sure to end in either the discomfiture of Elias or in the discomfiture of the prophets of the false gods. If in the first, then he would be free from the importunities and the threats of the Prophet; if in the second, then he need not fear the anger of Jezabel, who should be reduced to silence by the defeat of her friends—"And Achab sent to all the children of Israel, and gathered together the prophets unto Mount Carmel."

It was the first time that Elias was able to speak

publicly to the people of Israel since the drought had fallen on the land. With his usual vehemence, he upbraided the people for their weakness, which seemed to be the same vice that made the reign of the king a curse instead of a benediction. Surrounded by nations that knew not the true God, and that had set up images of wood and stone and had given them the titles of gods, they became less fervent in the service of the God of Israel. The success that crowned the deeds of the pagan nations misled the people of Israel, and they wrongly attributed the prosperity of other lands to the gods whom they worshipped. Then, there was in their midst a queen who was as strong as she was cruel, and so they took the easier way and paid tribute to the gods of Tyre and Sidon, whilst in their hearts they felt that it was wrong. They knew the history of their fathers and they knew how the God of Israel had led them forth from the land of slavery and had given to them a land "flowing with milk and honey," yet, when there was a question of their crops or their flocks, they did not scruple to pay homage to one of the innumerable gods that had found devotees amongst the chosen people. His opening sermon on this occasion was seemingly as brief as ever, but, as always, to the point—"And Elias coming to all the people said: How long do you halt between two sides? If the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him." Their keeping a fine balance between the God of Israel and the gods of Tyre and Sidon did not find any favor with the honest and fiery nature of the Prophet. To the warm and enthusiastic nature of Elias an open and sincere enemy was far preferable to a fickle friend. "Because thou art neither hot nor cold therefore shall I cast thee forth"—was a principle in the spiritual life that commended itself to Elias. "How long do you halt between two sides?"—exclaimed the man of God.

There was no reason, at least for them, who were the children of " the chosen people," to have any doubts as to which side they should take. There was a species of cowardice in their conduct under Achab that aroused the ire of the Prophet, and made them as a nation despicable in his sight. The insinuation that he has literally thrown in their faces is, perhaps, the greatest insult he could give them—that they could dream, even for a moment, that Baal could be their God, the God of the people who had their history, who possessed their traditions.

These words, uttered by the Prophet just at that time, and in the circumstances, and coming from the lips of him who was afire for the honor and glory of the one true God, was the most powerful sermon that could have been preached to them. It seems utterly outside the scope of the Prophet's immediate object to enlarge on the few, but pithy, words uttered. We have the result of this brief sermon told in the few words following—" And the people did not answer him a word." His speech was so direct, and to the point, that it did not admit of an answer in words; actions alone would be a reply to the inquiry which was in reality an indictment. The people eager to see the contest between the Prophet of Carmel and the ministers of the false gods had hurried to the scene, and, thus, Elias had the opportunity to address them in the presence of the king, to whom his words applied with special significance. Then came the prophets of Baal and Astarthe, not eagerly, by any means, for they had already felt that the critical moment had arrived for them and for what they represented. During three years the drought, brought to pass at the word of Elias, had resisted all their supplications to their gods. In vain they had recourse to those occult powers which they, at times, undoubtedly possessed. Such powers

as they were wont to borrow from the spirits of evil were paralysed in this struggle with the man of God. Summoned to Mount Carmel, where, of all places, they least wished to meet this man of extraordinary life and of irresistible word, a gloomy cloud descended on their journey, and they were in no hurry to arrive there. They dare not, however, disobey the king; neither dare they confess their inability to cope with Elias; so, evidently after the arrival of the people, there appeared on Carmel the four hundred prophets of Baal and the four hundred and fifty prophets of the groves.

Elias had seen their arrival, but he ignored their presence and spoke to the people—"And Elias said again to the people: I only remain a prophet of the Lord: but the prophets of Baal are four hundred and fifty." It is quite possible that Elias had an idea that he alone of all the prophets of the Lord had survived the persecution of the days of the drought. That, amongst the crowd which came to Carmel, there were many of the prophets who could be called so in the generic sense is fairly certain; but that there were any of the institute of Elias was not at all probable, for it was too soon after the persecution carried on by the queen for them to have issued forth from their hiding-places. Not only had Elias entertained this idea, but it must have been a fairly general opinion amongst the Israelites who had come to see the contest. The prophets who observed the same manner of life as Elias had either been put to death or had been concealed in the desert places or in the caves; as a consequence, their presence was not known, even by the majority of those who were favorable to them. On the other hand, it was rather an easy matter to summon the prophets of the false gods, because, as a rule, they lived in communities after the manner of the older

prophets of the Lord, and at least eight hundred and fifty could be reached at once through the band of prophets who were to be found in the royal palace.

The figure of the lonely Prophet standing apart from the crowd of people, and apart from the assembly of the prophets of Baal and Astarthe, must have made an impression on the Israelites in whose hearts yet burned the patriotic flame. Many were the prophets of the Lord to be found in Israel before the persecution of the queen, but now all seemed to have been taken away, save and except the one who was the embodiment of every quality that could redeem Israel. In sharp contrast with this lonely figure was the huge assembly of the prophets who were the enemies of the God of Israel. They, in the few years after the coming of the daughter of the king of Sidon, had multiplied beyond expectation, and were really aggressive. It was an object-lesson that was sure not to be lost on "the chosen people." One prophet of the Lord and eight hundred prophets of Baal and Astarthe! And this was the condition to which the kingdom of "the chosen people" was reduced! Elias knew how to touch the souls of his listeners, and, although there was no apparent necessity to call the attention of the king and the people to the terrible condition of the Faith in Israel, and to the growth of the worship of false gods, nevertheless, it was too good an opportunity to let pass; so the fiery words of the Prophet emphasising the thing that was so obvious made the courage of the false prophets fall still lower, whilst at the same time those same words must have brought a pang of shame to many an Israelite listening, who had never dreamt that their carelessness and apathy in the cause of the living God could be productive of such dire results.

CHAPTER XVI

THE UNANSWERED SACRIFICE ON MOUNT CARMEL

The challenge given by the man of God to the false prophets and, indirectly, to the people and the king is expressed in no uncertain terms by the lonely figure that stands apart from them all—"Let two bullocks be given us, and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces and lay it upon wood, but put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under it. Call ye on the names of your gods, and I will call on the name of my Lord: and the God that shall answer by fire, let Him be God." There was no mistaking the tenor of the challenge, so the narrative continues—"And all the people answering said: A very good proposal."

Common to every religion worthy of the name, is the sacrificial act. Elias was not taking any unfair advantage of the prophets opposed to him. In so far as they proclaimed that Baal was God, in so far were they bound by the ethics of religion to offer sacrifice to him; and the same may be said of the worship of all the pagan deities. That sacrificial act, in which the thing offered was totally destroyed, was the most perfect act of worship. There were other forms of sacrifice that did not demand the immolation or destruction of the offering, and thus, while they were indicative of communion and participation in nature with the gods themselves, they lacked the significance contained in the sacrifice which was to decide the issue put forth by Elias. In Genesis we read that after the Deluge, Noe, wishing to express his gratitude to God, and at the same time to assure Him of the adoration and the

homage in his heart, made sacrifice to the Lord—"And Noe built an altar unto the Lord: and taking of all the cattle and fowls that were clean, offered holocausts upon the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet smell and said: I will no more curse the earth for the sake of man . . . . I will no more destroy every living soul as I have done." The same significance is in every holocaust, namely, that as the offering is reduced to the vapor that ascends into the air—that is to say, on high—so all that man possesses belongs to "on high." In the destruction there is a recognition that all, here below, is under the Hand of God and, being His, there can be no better act of recognition of supreme dominion than to devote the offering in its totality to the Creator: an offering made after this manner can never return back to the possession of men. Elias and the false prophets were well aware that such offerings were very pleasing to the one true God, for so He had expressed Himself, and so He had made evident in the Temple, as well as in other places, and at other times. Both Elias and the false prophets were forced to declare to the people that such sacrifices were common to their religions, otherwise their following should be very small, indeed, because the people looked for such manifestations of the Lord's pleasure and displeasure. The prophets of Baal, in the sacrifices of which they boasted, had evidently recourse to trickery, although, at times, we must concede to them wonderful exhibitions of seeming supernatural events which could very well be regarded as the work of some powers that were, at least, diabolical. Under the eye of the fiery Prophet, there was small change for any underhand work; and, doubtless, the soul of the Prophet, strengthened by the days of retirement and prayer, was well able to cope with whatever powers of darkness the prophets of Baal might be inclined to invoke.

When it was a question of the right and the true worship of the God of Israel, the powers of evil that on other occasions were allowed some little sway because of the hardness of men's hearts, or for some other reason best known to the Lord, should not be permitted, with any hope of success, to enter the arena with the God who was the Master of the living and the dead, who was the Creator of the powers of evil, as well as of the elements that were directly for His praise and His glory. Elias knew well that his God would not be wanting to him in the hour of trial, when the question as to the empire over Israel of the one true God was to be decided. He despised the gods of the false prophets; and never did he proceed to any work so congenial to his enthusiastic spirit as he did to the deciding of the question—Who was the God of the chosen people?

The offering in the holocaust might be the ram or the bull, the lamb or the calf, the goat or the kid. It was essential that these animals should be of a certain age and sound throughout. No offering of animals beyond three years was admissible, and no blemish of any kind was to be tolerated. If during the preparation for the sacrifice any hidden blemish were found, then the offering was rejected. Sometimes the male of the dove and the pigeon were permitted in holocausts.

The usual method of offering the holocaust is described minutely in the Book of Leviticus, and we need not question the fact that, whatever were the ceremonials observed by the prophets of Baal, Elias kept as near to the prescribed ritual as was possible under the circumstances; hence, a glance at the ritual to be observed by the sacrificing priest in the Mosaic Law is of interest as throwing some light on the Sacrifice of Carmel.

"Speak to the children of Israel, and thou shalt say

to them: The man among you that shall offer to the Lord a sacrifice of the cattle, that is, offering victims of oxen and sheep, if his offering be a holocaust, and of the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish, at the door of the testimony, to make the Lord favorable to him. And he shall put his hand upon the head of the victim, and it shall be acceptable, and help to its expiation. And he shall immolate the calf before the Lord, and the priests the sons of Aaron shall offer the blood thereof, pouring it round about the altar, which is before the door of the tabernacle. And when they have flayed the victim, they shall cut the joints into pieces, and shall put fire on the altar, having before laid in order a pile of wood: and they shall lay the parts that are cut out in order thereupon; to wit, the head, and all things that cleave to the liver, the entrails and feet being washed with water: and the priest shall burn them upon the altar for a holocaust, and a sweet savor to the Lord."

The altar of the Temple was richly supplied with all the appurtenances for the carrying out, in all its splendor, of the Mosaic ritual. The same vessels and the same means to immolate, and to prepare, the victims were not to be expected on the hills, where there were merely the old altars recognised in the traditions of the chosen people, of which one seems to have been Carmel. It was not a difficult matter to obtain at once the animals for the sacrifice, because there was always a host of such animals in Israel. In spite of the drought, there should be still preserved many of the animals required for the service of the Lord; and no doubt Jezabel and her prophets took care to have always at hand everything that was required in their sacred rites. The mountain height seems to be the place that is most suitable for this sacrificial act. Noe, when the ark rested on the mountain, forthwith

built an altar to the Lord, whereon he sacrificed. On the other hand, when Moses had written the words of the Law according as the Lord had directed him, we are told—"Moses wrote the words of the Lord and rising in the morning he built an altar at the foot of the mount." There were, however, special reasons why Carmel should be chosen by the Prophet of the God of Israel, but later on in the present work we shall treat of those. Hence, the choice of place was the work of inspiration.

The conditions under which the trial was to be enacted were declared by Elias, but they seem eminently fair to the prophets of the false gods, for they give them every opportunity to prepare their material for the sacrifice according to their own rites and ceremonies—"Then Elias said to the prophets of Baal: Choose you one bullock, and dress it first, because you are many; and call on the names of your gods, but put no fire under. And they took the bullock which he gave them, and dressed it."

A rather interesting story has been added by the Rabbinical commentators in reference to the scriptural narrative. As it is stated that the bullock intended for the sacrifice "was given" to the prophets by Elias, they proceed to explain that the bullock, when it was brought to the Mount, ran towards Elias, as if in protest against its being offered to the false gods. The instinct of the animal seems to have urged it to flee from the profanation which it was to experience at the hands of the false prophets and to seek refuge by the side of him who was struggling for the God who had made it, and to whose service it should be dedicated. If it is recalled that the Gentiles were allowed, on certain conditions, to sacrifice to the Lord, even in the Temple, we must, then, attribute the instinctive repugnance of the bullock to the fact that it was the particular trial, in which it

was to figure, that was objectionable. In the Book of Numbers we read—" Both they that are born in the land and the strangers shall offer sacrifices after the same rite." The same idea is referred to in the Third Book of Kings—" Moreover also the stranger, who is not of thy people Israel, when he shall come out of a far country for thy name's sake (for they shall hear everywhere of thy great name and thy mighty hand, and thy stretched out arm), so when he shall come, and shall pray in this place: Then hear thou in heaven, in the firmament of thy dwelling place, and do all those things for which the stranger shall call upon thee." Josephus also makes mention of the sacrifices which it was lawful for the Gentiles to offer at the Temple. If in the Temple, then it was more permissible to offer on the mountains or holy places, whereon the God of Israel was at times wont to be worshipped, thus, by sacrifice.

The altar on Mount Carmel must have been in accord with the demands of the Hebrew custom, which we find stated rather succinctly in the Book of Exodus—" You shall make an altar of earth unto Me: and you shall offer upon it your holocaust and peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen, in every place where the memory of My name shall be. I will come to thee and will bless thee. And if thou make an altar of stone to Me, thou shalt not build it of hewn stones; for if thou lift up a tool upon it, it shall be defiled. Thou shalt not go up by steps unto My altar lest thy nakedness be discovered." There seems to have been an altar from olden times on the Mount, so it was only a question of Elias adapting the altar to present uses. It appears there was no essential difference in the manner of building the altar for the Israelite and for the follower of the gods of Tyre and Sidon.

The injunction that no fire should be placed under the sacrificial elements was an important one, for it was

one of the charges laid at the door of the priests of heathendom that they had recourse to many clever deceptions in their priestly work and, especially so, in the question of the offering of whole-burnt sacrifices. A fire skilfully concealed in the interior of an altar could perform many acts that should cause wonder—at least to those who knew nothing of its presence. The secrets of nature that were the undoubted possession of some of the priests of the gods of heathendom could be called upon and so utilized that, under given conditions, a fire should result and then—all the consequences of those marvellous happenings that were attributed to the priests of Baal. As a rule, fire was permitted in the offering of sacrifice when it was intended to be a holocaust; and then the arranging of the fire and all the attendant ritual acts were the work of the priest's attendants. When Elias gave the decree—"Put no fire under," he reduced the trial to an evident appeal to the supernatural powers. It was, then, to be a real trial of strength between him and the priests of Baal and Astarthe, without any chance of trickery or questionable methods. And the trial was to be in the sight of the people and the king, who were to be the judges of the means used, as well as the result. The people thoroughly understood the nature of the challenge, since the answer to the question: Who was the true God of Israel? was the total consummation of the offering, or, in other words, the sending down fire from heaven, so that the Lord would thus show which sacrifice was acceptable. Neither Elias nor the prophets were permitted the use of any fire; hence, there was only the one way in which the offering could be consumed. As it had often occurred in the past, so on the present occasion the only satisfactory answer was what might be termed "the answer of the God by fire." This was the point insisted on by Elias in the

challenge—" and the God that shall answer by fire, let Him be God."

That the Lord would show His acceptance of the sacrifice was recognised by the people of Israel, who could recall how the God of Israel had shown His pleasure in the offering of Moses and Aaron—" And the glory of the Lord appeared to all the multitude. And, behold, a fire coming forth from the Lord, devoured the holocaust, and the fat that was on the altar; which when the multitude saw, they praised the Lord, falling on their faces." It was thus that the Lord put the seal of His approbation on the holocaust offered. It was for this sign the people awaited. It would have been an act of imprudence to demand such answer except the circumstances justified the petition. But surely, if ever there were such circumstances, it was in the reign of Achab.

Then we are told in the Sacred Narrative—" And they took the bullock which he gave them, and dressed it. And they called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying: O, Baal, hear us." It seems quite evident that in the preparation of the victim the false prophets followed the customs of the priests of the people of God. The Sacred Writer says nothing about any peculiarities in the preparation of the victim. Before the eyes of the people, whose deception they were anxious to continue, they would be most careful to recede as little as possible from the recognised mode ordered by the ritual of the nation.

The contest began with the morning and lasted until noon, but no result had as yet been obtained by the false prophets, so " the prophesying " continued until the afternoon. We must not be amazed at the " crying aloud " and the " prophesying " on the part of the prophets, for it was the custom in the Temple to accompany sacrifices with music, both vocal and instru-

mental, the priests using trumpets and the Levites instruments introduced by King David. Naturally, on the mountain-side, one cannot expect the same ceremony; nevertheless, the oral prayers and the chanting of the priests of Baal were a supplement for what usually accompanied their sacrificial rites. In addition to the music, it was customary for the people to pray in conjunction with the actions of the sacrificing ministers. We do not read of any participation by the people during the offering by the false prophets on Carmel. It would seem that in the presence of the man of God, whose very appearance spoke of devotion to the God of Israel, the people had not dared to raise their voices in supplication to Baal; hence, they left the whole ceremony to the prophets of Baal and Astarthe. The number of the prophets engaged in the ceremony was quite sufficient to form a rather large choir, even if we presume that the instruments for the music were wanting. The continued prayers and supplications to Baal can be easily understood when we remember that they, in all probability, took the task of supplication—that is to say "crying aloud and prophesying"—in turns. It does not seem, then, farfetched when we read that they "called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon," and then through the afternoon.

The worship of Baal seemed to have usurped not only the worship of all the other inferior deities, but it also seemed to have challenged the worship of the true God of Israel in the lives of the chosen people. Long before the Hebrews came to the land of Canaan, the worship of Baal was cultivated amongst the inhabitants and, in the ages that followed, even with the presence of the people of God, the false deity held sway, but not at all in the hearts, or the lives, of the chosen people. As a matter of fact, until after the separation

of the Tribes, the cult of Baal was practically unknown in the lives of the people of Israel. However, in the reign of Achab we read—" Nor was it enough for him to walk in the sins of Nabat; but he also took to wife Jezabel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians. And he went and served Baal, and adored him. And he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he built in Samaria." This excerpt from the sacred narrative throws much light on the state of religion amongst the people of God, for the king is a fairly good gauge of the manners and the customs of the people in general. We have, then, a lamentable state of affairs, which gives us a key to the scene which we now review on the heights of Carmel. The father of the queen was Ethbaal, which, being interpreted, means—" the favorite of the god Baal." Before his accession to the throne of Sidon he had been a priest of the favorite god of his fatherland. It seems unquestionable that he obtained the kingdom in no very creditable way. We should not wonder if he attributed his good fortune to the favor of the god whose name he bore. The sacred narrator of the Book of Kings does not forget the indignity done to the land of Israel by the union with the house of this priest-king. We read—" Nor was it enough for him to walk in the sins of Nabat," but the real unforgivable sin was his attachment to " this god, Baal." It is not at all improbable that in the insistent calling upon their god, the prophets were not forgetful of the fact that he had found favor with the king of Israel and that, should the sacrifice be consummated, assuredly a mighty claim had been made by Baal to the worship of the people, as well as of the king and his court.

We have no mention of the goddess of the prophets " who ate at the table of Jezabel," and who were really the ministers of the deity that reigned over the devotees

who worshiped Astarthe in the groves of the goddess. At first sight, it may appear a little incongruous that the Prophet should name specially "the prophets of the groves," and yet we find no mention of this female deity in the contest on Carmel.

Astarthe was in a special manner the deity of the Sidonians—indeed, it is so declared in the eleventh chapter of the Third Book of Kings: "But Solomon worshipped Astarthe the goddess of the Sidonians." Just as Baal is spoken of as the sun-god, so Astarthe is named, at times, the moon-god. She, elsewhere, appears as Venus, the goddess of love; hence, her rites at times are very objectionable, and especially so to the right-minded child of the chosen people. She is really the representation of the productive female principle in nature; and it is to her worship that the words found in Deuteronomy apply—"Thou shalt plant no grove, nor any tree near the altar of the Lord thy God." It may be that her close association with the god Baal made it unnecessary that her name should be coupled with that of the greater god in the prayers and supplications made on the occasion of a great sacrifice, such as that which was to take place on Carmel.

Baal was, in the mind of the false prophets, the great divine principle whose power extended over all other minor divine energies. The chosen people had a fairly complete knowledge of this deity, for, in every nation around, he was worshipped under some of the many varied forms given him. As we have already remarked, he was specially an object of worship for centuries in the very land wherein the Israelites found themselves. He was in a special manner the god of the soil, who gave to it fertility. Under this guise, he was earnestly supplicated by the people who saw the terrible condition to which the plains of Israel had been reduced—but, evidently, all in vain. His invocation at this particular

time was considered very opportune, for he was invoked as "the principle of death and destruction," as well as the motive power of "life and energy." Without doubt, it was under the twofold principle that the prophets called on him for his aid. He was to heal the parched field, and give fruitfulness to the arid plains; he was to give life and strength to the tree, and the flower, and the shrub and the grass: these conditions could not be effected except by the coming of the rain and the dews which had been withheld at the word of the Prophet—"O, Baal, hear us!" cried his devotees—and with much reason.

All was confusion and noise below, but above, in the heavens, no "voice, nor any that answered." Still lay on the altar the bullock cut piecemeal; in vain had the prophets poured the blood over the slain carcase; in vain had they saturated the hastily-made horns on the altar; no voice came to answer their prayer; no action was vouchsafed to show favor to their proposed sacrifice. It was thus that the noontime came—and the fulfilment of any hope was as far away as ever from the hearts and the minds of the prophets of Baal.

The priests of Baal were a recognised order amongst the people and the princes of the nations that paid worship to the false deities. We know that they had their code of rules and their ritual for ceremonies; as a matter of fact, they were robed and equipped for sacred functions very much after the fashion of the Priests of the Temple; some of their fantastic accompaniments were of still greater grandeur than anything we know of in the ritual of the Levites. We need not state that in their ceremonies and in their observances they were already well-established centuries before the Mosaic ordinances. With that flexibility ever to be found in all that pertains to ceremonies and religions

not founded on the truth, the priests could adapt themselves and their manner of carrying out so-called sacred functions to the varying exigencies of time and place. Hence, we have insisted on the similarity in the ritual of the false prophets on Carmel and in that of the Prophet of the Lord, who, naturally, should keep to the Law and the traditions in everything that pertained to sacrifice—that act by which man was brought so near to God, and God so near to man. When we read that in their misery and their frenzy at the thought of their defeat " they leaped over the altar that they had made," we have a repetition of a part of their ritual on certain solemn occasions, when they wished to identify themselves in a closer manner with the offering made to their god. Such manœuvres cannot be judged according to any modern standard, for we must recall that it is related of David, how he " danced with all his might before the Lord "—that is to say, before the Ark of the Covenant, which was being carried into the city of Jerusalem.

The time had passed for the offering of the sacrifice of the morning, but Elias was quite willing to allow every moment they desired in order that they might try the efficacy of the god Baal. The stern features of the Prophet of Israel suddenly became changed, and an amused smile lighted his countenance. To the surprise of the crowds surrounding the sacred place, and to the utter dismay of the false prophets, the man of God began to jest and make merry at the antics of his opponents—" And when it was now noon, Elias jested at them, saying: Cry with a louder voice: for he is a god, and perhaps he is talking, or is in an inn, or on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep, and must be awakened."

Until the hour of noon had come there was some expectation amongst the people and also in the mind of

the king that the sacrifice might be accepted. It was because they had expected some such thing that they had declared the trial "was a very good proposal." Only one in all the gathering knew how hollow was that expectation; some may have been in doubt; he, alone, who was the instrument of the God of Israel, knew the final upshot of the trial, seeing it clearly with the eyes of faith. His purpose, then, was to expose to their own sense of humor their vain credulity in the gods of the stranger. Humor will appeal to a crowd when even reason fails to make an impression. It was a relief to the mind of Elias when he had exposed the ludicrous nature of the gods who had taken the place of his God in the hearts of the people of Israel. How the very souls of the king and people must have been tortured at the sad, but withal ridiculous, spectacle of those prophets who had lately been the guides of the kingdom of Israel! What the people had so often gazed upon with reverent and expectant hearts was now the object of jest and merriment on the part of him who had closed the heavens against rain and dew. The king had stood on the altars administered by these poor helpless prophets, and he had swung the incense into the gaping countenace of this god who was powerless in the presence of one whom he had called a disturber of the kingdom of Israel. The ridicule of the man of God was sufficient commentary on the treachery of Israel and the back-sliding of the king. Men, writers, poets, dramatists, musicians—all have, in turn, tried to picture this scene, but it is all in vain. It is indescribable! It was something to be looked at and never to be forgotten. The brief description given us by the sacred narrator is quite enough for us, and we must trust our imagination to supply the rest.

The last act in what we may term "the forbidden sacrifice" is yet to come, and it was brought about by

this very ridicule of the Prophet in the face of Israel, and its king, and its new gods.

"So they cried with a loud voice, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till they were covered with blood." Thus was enacted the last scene in this failure of the gods. The most perfect sacrifice to the heathen deity was the shedding of human blood. Indeed, many of the gods demanded that; and no other offering was acceptable, for the gods of the Gentiles were a blood-thirsty lot, as we can learn from the Sacred Page, and as we know from the records of history. However, the prophets were moved to this excess—this act which was presumed to be the irresistible appeal to the gods—rather than suffer the ridicule of the man of God. In one sense, it was an excess, and yet, in another, it was the most perfect ceremony, because the intermingling of the blood of the victim and the blood of the priests who were sacrificing was the supposed irresistible element in the highest offering of man to the deity. This ultimate appeal to the god Baal must have been foreseen by the prophets, for they had brought along with them the instruments of torture to effect the perfect offering—"the knives and the lancets." The scene must have been imposing, and at the same time terrible, to see the crowd of devotees bathed in their own blood leaping over the altar whereon lay the victim—mingling the human blood with the now almost congealed blood of the slain bullock.

The end is almost pathetic—if such terrible responsibilities had not been attached to the issue—"And after mid-day was past, and while they were prophesying, the time was come of offering sacrifice, and there was no voice heard, nor did anyone answer, nor regard them as they prayed." Such is the description of the failure of the great god of paganism whilst doing battle against the Lord God of Israel.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ANSWERED SACRIFICE ON MOUNT CARMEL

The question proposed by the Prophet of the God of Israel had received one of the answers, but the second and the final answer was yet forthcoming. A gleam of hope still glimmered in the hearts of the prophets of Baal, and that hope was—that as their god had failed to answer so, also, might it be with the God of Elias.

The altar that had been used for the victim offered to Baal was not to be used by Elias, for, in his eyes, the very fact that an altar had supported a victim to be offered to a false god was sufficient to defile it. No matter what might have been the antiquity of the altar used by the prophets of Baal; no matter how hallowed it might have been by past service in the cause of the one true God; nevertheless, because of the fact that it had been used in the recent trial against the God of Israel, it stood condemned. Elias was determined to follow out, as far as possible, the ritual which the Law and the Traditions demanded. Alone, he could not make the remote preparations, so he called for help—"Elias said to all the people: Come ye unto me. And the people coming near unto him, he repaired the altar of the Lord, that was broken down." Not all, of course, but some, were privileged to help him.

Some assert that the prophets of Baal, in their anger and in their fanaticism, had destroyed the altar on which had reposed the bullock given them by Elias. If we accept the opinion that the place used was the same for both sacrifices, it is more probable that Elias had the altar, in so far as it had been accommodated to

the sacrifice of the prophets, destroyed, and then he proceeded, with the help of the people, to build it up anew. On the other hand, it is very probable that the prophets of Baal had used an altar near to the older altar which had been destroyed by order of Jezabel, whilst she was engaged in the persecution of the prophets of the Lord. Elias, as if in defiance of the order of the queen, now restores the altar that had seen other times and that was sanctified in the days gone by. It was exactly what Elias would do, and on such occasion, and in presence of the people who had been terrorised by the fierce Jezabel, and in the presence of him who had become at her bidding a traitor to the Law and the traditions of the people of God. The prophets would not use the old altar out of respect for the prohibition of their queen and protectrix; whilst Elias would use that very altar to show his defiance of the enemies of the God of Israel, in whose name he spoke and for whose honor he struggled.

We have already referred to the manner in which an altar should be prepared for receiving the victim for the sacrifice. Here, however, we have a more minute description of the method in which the Prophet proceeded—"And he took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came saying: Israel shall be thy name. And he built with the stones an altar to the name of the Lord." In the present trial of strength against the prophets of Baal, the man of God recalled to the assembled Israelites that though the children of their Father Jacob had been divided by the devices of men, yet, in the sight of God, they were all His children and should so be His servants. It was an appeal to them which, on this occasion, should touch their hearts by recalling their past glories and their relations with the one true God. The stones were taken from the bed

of the river Cison, where they had been cleansed and prepared by the running waters. The stones that had been touched by the blood of the victim of the prophets of Baal were not sufficiently pure to participate in this sacrifice which the Prophet was about to offer. On the altar of the Temple the names of the twelve tribes were inscribed on the stones, but here, on the mountain's brow, there was not time for this procedure. Nevertheless, the representation was there, as can be seen. In the dedication of the altar there is no doubt that Elias recalled the incident that we find recorded in Genesis—"Thy name shall not be called Jacob but Israel: for if thou hast been strong against God, how much more shalt thou prevail against men?" It would be a strong recalling of the people to the service of the God of Jacob—Who was also the God of Israel.

Elias was determined that the people should see and observe all that was going on in the preparation of the altar; hence, not only those who were privileged to help in the work of preparation, but all the people, were invited to draw nearer, so as to prevent any doubts that might be raised by the enemies of the Prophet after the sacrifice had been accomplished. That the work of the Lord should appear more evident, the Prophet ordered the men to bring up from the Cison vessels of water, and these he poured into a trench two furrows in breadth, which completely encircled the altar. Then the wood was laid on the altar after the manner of the ritual. The bullock, cut in pieces, was laid on the wood. Whatever may have been the help Elias received from the assembled Israelites in the preparation of the altar, the whole ritual of the offering was carried out by himself—and that offering was an act of love as well as adoration from him of the fiery word and the generous heart. It was he who cut the throat of the victim and severed completely the

windpipe. The blood was caught by him in the rude vessels and poured on the altar. It was he who, when the blood was disposed of, flayed the animal, depriving it of its fat and leaving it open and naked on the altar, where the fragments awaited the final prayer of the Prophet. To assure the minds of the onlookers, and to satisfy the doubts of the prophets of Baal, Elias took an extra precaution—in fact, one that was not in any way an obligation—"And he said to the helpers: Fill four buckets with water, and pour it upon the burnt offering, and upon the wood. And again he said: Do the same a second time. And when they had done it the second time, he said: Do the same also the third time. And they did so the third time. And the water ran round about the altar, and the trench was filled with water."

In this solemn scene, no wonder that the mystics have seen a prefigure of the wonderful effects of the waters of baptism. Ere the victim is taken up into the heavens the water is thrice thrown on it, just as in baptism the water is poured on the catechumen "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." As this action of Elias was a preparation for the perfect holocaust, so the sacramental action is a preparation for the enjoyment of the perfect Sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifices of the Old Law were only figures of the one great Sacrifice of the Cross. It may have been that Elias intended the throwing on of the water to be a reassurance to the minds of the Israelites present; nevertheless, the Lord intended to prepare men's minds for the fulfilment of the things that were to come when the Messias would appear in the haunts of men.

Saint Chrysostom tells us that he had often seen with his own eyes the altars of the false prophets, and he had observed that inside there were places for fires that, even when in full blaze, would be hidden from the eyes of the onlookers, and so very strong was the heat that

it could set on fire and reduce to vapor the victim placed on the altars. His opinion is that Elias did the saturating with water to show that there could not be any deception. In a matter of such consequence, he was resolved that there should not be the shadow of a doubt. Whatever be the real reason why the man of God had poured the water over the victim, and allowed it to flow in rings around the altar, one thing is sure, that it was not done for any mere vain purpose, and that it was a necessary detail in the sacrificial action—at least, for its completion as a proof of the contention of the Prophet.

The preparations had occupied so much of the day that the time for the evening sacrifice had come. We have not dwelt on the question that has occupied many of the Fathers of the Church, namely, why Elias offered the sacrifice outside the Temple, since such was prohibited by the Law? It is sufficient for us to know Elias was filled with the spirit of the Lord, and what he did was done at the inspiration of his Master. It is not for us, then, to put any limit to the work of Elias, when he was the special messenger of the God of Israel, Who is not bound by laws, nor is He subject to the criticism of men. The question has its interest for those who treat of it as did the holy men in the earlier years of the Church, who were filled with the spirit of the Lord in a way, lesser if we will, than Elias, but, all the same, they possessed to a great degree the spirit that strengthened the man of God to do the things that appear to us now of such moment.

"And when it was now time to offer the holocaust, Elias the Prophet came near and said: O Lord God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Israel, shew this day that Thou art the God of Israel, and I, Thy servant, and that according to Thy commandment I have done all these things. Hear me, O Lord, hear me: that this

people may learn, that Thou art the Lord God and that Thou hast turned their heart again." We have, here, the confession that this trial, this sacrifice, had been done by the wish and the command of the Lord God Who desired once more to testify to the world how dear this people was to Him, notwithstanding all the neglect of, aye, and treason to Him. Elias was only the servant of the God of Israel. A faithful servant, indeed, and now, as always, fighting for the Lord God Who was his strength. The prayer is a magnificent appeal to the God of Israel, recalling, as it does, the giants who had been zealous for His honor in the days gone by. It is a profession of faith in the face of the multitude that had begun to forget their God. It is an expression of the Prophet's humility, attributing all to God whose servant he was. It is a fervent appeal to the people of Israel, and also to the weak-willed king, to come back once more to the only source of greatness for themselves, as well as for Israel. If we regard the prayer from the point of view of the ascetic, it shall be found a most perfect prayer containing all the elements—and these, too, in their most brief and most pithy form—that go to form a prayer that must be a model for every Christian soul that is engaged in doing the work of the Lord in the face of the world. In the presence of the prophets of Baal there is no shirking the issue, for, in a few succinct words, the challenge is repeated; but now it appears in a form that shows it is already decided.

Then occurred one of those stupendous affairs which excite the imagination, even through the long vista of ages. The Chronicler of this wondrous event does not dwell on the awe-inspiring scene. He does not attempt to give the reader an idea of the fire-glow on Carmel when the sacrifice of Elias was stolen by heavenly hosts. He rushes from one stage of the soul-stirring panorama

to another, as if to dismiss in the fewest possible words a scene that was from its nature indescribable—" Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the holocaust, and the wood, and the stone, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench." The description is meagre—but it is intensely expressive, and almost every word has its own place in an historical picture which no other word could so eloquently reproduce and so effectively express.

The answer to the prayer of the Prophet was grander and more effective than he had ever preconceived. He, alone, stood unmoved when the heavens opened and sent down their dazzling bars of lightning. Those lightning-flashes rushed around the Mount and centered all their force on the little pile that had been heaped up on the altar by Elias. For a moment the waters around the altar were throwing back the dazzling rays of light and, then, the next moment they were eaten up by the devouring flames that spared nothing. Not content with carrying off the victim, the heavenly flames ate into the stone and the wood, and even the very dust that lay on the mountain's brow—all, everything was meet food for this celestial visitant. To-day, the traveller is shown on the brow of Carmel " the altar of Elias," but who can say is it the remnant of the sacrifice which the Lord had so honored, or, mayhap, it is the memorial which the man of God raised in grateful memory of the day when the Lord confirmed His words with the lightning of heaven. It matters not—for Carmel is, forever, associated with this event in the life of the Prophet, which shall live as long as his memory lives.

We have said that he, alone, remained unmoved at the sight that was presented to the eyes of the onlookers on Carmel. The prophets of Baal hid their faces in terror of the things that were then happening—and in

fear for the things that they knew must of necessity follow this exhibition of heavenly favor to the enemy of their priesthood. The people, aroused from their lethargy at the splendor of the sight and at the awfulness of it, fell on their faces, in well-founded terror at this manifestation of the God whom they had neglected, at this manifestation of the God whose favor they had sold for the empty favor of the powerless gods of Tyre and Sidon. The narrative, though brief, is expressive of the effect that the answer, vouchsafed to the Prophet of the God of Israel, produced on the Israelites present—" And when the people saw this they fell on their faces. And they said: The Lord He is God; the Lord He is God."

It must have been sheer fear that made many of the people on the Mount fall to the earth on their faces; others, no doubt, did so in thanksgiving for the favor once more conferred on the people of Israel. It was a sign that at least the Lord had not deserted this ungrateful people. None of them had been prepared for the decisive victory, and especially for the manner in which it had been expressed, though all those who had been thus far faithful to Israel must have been assured in their hearts that the God of Israel could never suffer defeat in the trial with the gods of the strangers. Elias had made the king and the people the judges of the contest, and now, before he had time to ask the decision, the people cry aloud the verdict—" The Lord He is God," and in the intensity of their new faith they repeat the verdict—" The Lord He is God "—thus showing how deeply they had been affected by the extraordinary scene. This occurrence on Carmel seems to have been more effective to make the people come back to their old faith than had been the three years' drought, because, during the time of the affliction, many of them had remained unmoved.

There was still room for doubt as to the cause and the reason for the water-famine, but here, upon Carmel, there was the evident visitation of the Lord which no one there could dare to question, in the face of the events which had preceded. Nevertheless, we must not forget that the drought was a preparation for the renewal of the faith in the hearts of the people. To all the origin of the drought was now evident, likewise how justly God had visited His people. The holocaust on Mount Carmel was simply the crowning of the events of the three years that preceded. Adversity is always a good guide to teach us to view things in their proper perspective. Affliction prepares the mind to gaze into the face of truth. Without adversity, without affliction, truth loses its two most impressive heralds—at least, so it appears to the children of men, in this valley of tears.

Elias knew well the fickleness of the hearts of many of the people listening to him and, above all, he knew the weakness of the king, whose sentiments were rather difficult to fathom on the great occasion, for he had to return to Jezabel, who was adamantine when there was a question of the gods of her father. Elias had made no mistake as to the present sentiments of the awe-stricken crowd. He had no doubt of their faith for the moment, and he determined to work on their present state to rid themselves of some of the obstacles that should meet them as soon as they had returned to their homes. It would appear to him as an act of culpable negligence if he were to allow the occasion to pass without taking energetic measures for the protection of the faith of the people. Several of the kings of Juda and of Israel had made efforts—and very honest and very sincere ones, too,—to bring the people far away from the worship of false gods; but those efforts had never been so thorough as they should have been. They had never shown the same determination in doing good

that the kings who had introduced the abuses amongst the people had shown in doing evil; it seemed more or less the inheritance of the Hebrew king to do weakly the work of the Lord, but to do well the work of the evil powers. Elias dared not send the people back to their families and to their daily life with all the old temptations around them, and still under the influence of the evil genius of Israel—namely, the wife of Achab. With such adverse influences, vain should be the memory of the three years' drought. The present manifestation should soon be accounted amongst the many other grand episodes in the history of the people of God—this very scene on Mount Carmel, when they had been so affected that they had thrown themselves on their faces and had cried aloud—"The Lord He is God." It must not even be questioned that the next step which the Prophet took was inspired by the Lord God of Israel. That step has made Elias the admiration, as well as the terror, of all the ages.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MASSACRE OF THE FALSE PROPHETS

Had the result of the challenge made to the prophets of Baal favored them instead of Elias, there is no doubting what the fate of the Prophet should have been. Already the queen had put to death all the prophets of the Lord whom she could find. Elias had not fallen under her machinations, because the Lord had thus far delivered him from the hands of his enemies. Nothing could have saved him, had the sacrifice of the followers of Baal been a success. The opportunity would have been gladly availed of, even by the king, to put an end to this troublesome messenger of the God of Israel. The hatred of the queen for the prophets of the Lord was nourished and fomented by those very bands of false prophets who were preying on the resources of the kingdom, and the opportunity which would then have seemed to present itself to have the wishes of the queen fulfilled should never have been allowed to pass by them, even though the king might not have been disposed to proceed to extreme measures against the Prophet.

Hence, we can see at once that the struggle between Elias and his opponents was one to the death. Indeed, there was no other way in which the matter could be satisfactorily settled. The prophets recognised that; and Elias was equally aware that there was only the one conclusion to a trial such as had taken place. This was the tenor of the indignant exclamation to the people on the part of the fiery Prophet—"How long do you halt between two sides? If the Lord be God, follow

Him, but if Baal, then follow him." This meanness of "the chosen people," who were giving a half-hearted recognition to their God, and at the same time weighing Him in the scales with the gods of the strangers. Baalim could be tolerated no longer. The good God was tired of this milk-and-water method of worshipping. To the enthusiastic nature of the Prophet, it was the worst kind of sin—this dilly-dallying between the God of Israel and the gods of Tyre and Sidon. The heart of the people might not be so perverse only for the adverse influences caused by the presence in their midst of those temples raised to the strange gods and the bad example of the king. If these two influences were removed, then the people of Israel would be more apt to continue faithful to the religion of their fathers. It was, therefore, the one aim in the life of the Prophet so to arrange matters that the people would return to their God and forsake Him no more.

It was well known by the king and the prophets of Baal what the attitude of the people present should be to the priests, who were in the eyes of the faithful follower of the God of Israel nothing less than blasphemers, for such they had been proven by the testimony of God, himself. In addition to their idolatry, there was the added sin of trying to take away the honor of the God of Israel and to make Him in the eyes of His own people a Deity unworthy of honor and respect, much less of adoration. The Law was known to all as declared in the Sacred Code, which was nothing else than the word of God—"He that sacrificeth to gods, shall be put to death, save only to the Lord." And the exhortation of Moses was ever before their eyes—"Keep therefore your souls carefully. You saw not any similitude in the day that the Lord spoke to you in Horeb from the midst of the fire," and the Law-Giver reminded them of the fact that "Neither is

there any other nation so great, that hath gods so nigh them as our God is present to all our petitions." Because of the very proneness of the people to this vice of idolatry the Patriarchs had always specially warned them against its heinousness. The predecessor in the sacred office of the "Father" of "the sons of the prophets" had slain with his own hand the king who had inflicted wrongs on the people of the Lord—"And Samuel said: As thy sword hath made women childless so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed him in pieces before the Lord in Galgal." The same fervor had now seized on the Prophet of Carmel. It is not at all probable that Elias could inflict death on all the false prophets that were assembled on the Mount. He led the way in the slaughter of the enemies of God, and consequently of the enemies of the land of Israel. He must have called on the people to assist in the work. It was as when the sons of Levi had been gathered to the side of the Lord to avenge the idolatry of the people in the desert, then on their way to the Land of Promise. The Law-Giver, Moses, was incensed at the ingratitude of the people and he said—"If any man be on the Lord's side let him join with me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said to them: Thus sayeth the Lord God of Israel: Put every man his sword on his thigh. Go and return from gate to gate through the midst of the camp, and let every man kill his brother, and friend his neighbor. And the sons of Levi did according to the words of Moses; and there were slain that day about three and twenty thousand men." Thus we see that the command given to the sons of Levi was through the mouth of Moses. In the same way Elias, the Prophet of Carmel, had given the command to the people of Israel who were on the Mount, and they did the work of the Lord. The narrative in the Third

Book of Kings is according to the tenor of the many passages in the Holy Writ, when there was a question of the terrible sin of idolatry and of placing false gods in the temples of the people—" And Elias said to them : Take the prophets of Baal, and let not one of them escape. And when they had them taken, Elias brought them down to the torrent Cison, and killed them there."

Only those who have not studied the times in which Elias lived, and who would judge the acts of so many centuries past by a standard that has changed at least in regard to the appearances of things, would deem the Prophet to have been both cruel and blood-thirsty. For those who would form a safe judgment, it is sufficient to recall the mission of Elias, and to keep before the mind that he was the messenger of the God of Israel, and that, in those greater and more important actions connected with his mission, he was inspired by the God of Israel; hence, we need not have any misgiving as to the morality of any of the acts of Elias. This does not deprive us of the liberty of speculating why the Lord allowed and sanctioned certain acts and to try, as far as we can in all human industry, to solve the problem, namely—what seems to have been the design of Providence in Its dealings with a people so beloved of God and called very justly " the chosen people."

The value of human life is best understood by the Creator of it. He, better than any human being, can gauge its worth in comparison to other issues in the sphere of human affairs. When we read in the Book of Genesis that God repented that He had made man, and so determined to destroy His handiwork—" I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth, from the creeping things even to the fowls of the air : for it repenteth Me that I have made them "—he

should be a bold critic who would question either the right or the wisdom of the Lord in thus dealing with His own handiwork. Because of their sins the Lord allowed the Israelites to be again and again slaughtered, and at times, He Himself was the power to command the massacre—" And Israel at that time abode in Settim "—and their princes and their soldiers had sinned, for they had been called to the sacrifices of the strange gods, namely, Beelphegor—" And they ate of them and adored their gods. Upon which the Lord being angry, said to Moses: Take all the princes of the people and hang them up on gibbets against the sun. Let every man kill his neighbor "; and the result of all these precautions was that—" There were slain four and twenty thousand men." Obedience to the Law of God was a far more important consideration than the value of any human life. Should that time in the history of mankind be reached when this proportion—namely, between the Law of God and the life of man—be not recognised, the historian must not lose sight of the fact that there was a time when the true proportion was recognised; and the moralist must insist that the time shall never be when it ought not be recognised and honored.

Elias was of an enthusiastic nature, and we always associate with such characters kindness and consideration for others. That he loved the people of Israel is certain, but it is equally certain that he loved far more the God of Israel. When, therefore, he saw men who were bent on the spiritual destruction of the people and the robbing of all honor from the God of Israel, his soul burned with a great hate for them, or rather for their sin, and he would willingly do all that was necessary to have them removed from the face of the earth. It was his business, his mission. His enthusiasm entered into the hearts of the assembled multitude, and they right

willingly hearkened to the exhortation of the master spirit on Carmel. Participators in this fiery spirit of Elias, they saw clearly the meanness of their treachery to the God of Israel—the God of their fathers, of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. In a moment, enlightened by the awe-inspiring events of the day, they discarded the cowardice which had been instilled into them by the fierce cruelty and the unrelenting tyranny of the queen, Jezabel. The presence of the king was no hindrance to their enthusiasm, for he, too, had been convicted, as had been the prophets of Baal, although his position should protect him from the penalty well merited by the prophets. If the Prophet spared him, then it was no affair of the people to take the law into their own hands and punish the guilty king—" Take the prophets of Baal and let not one of them escape." The Prophet mentions the one class of prophets, but the people well understood him, so the whole band of the priests of the false gods was seized, and, as the Prophet commanded, " not one of them escaped." The sacred Mount of Carmel that had re-echoed to the cry of—" The Lord He is God "—the profession of faith on the part of the people; the sacred Mount that had seen the lightning of heaven descend and consume the sacrifice of Elias, must not be polluted once more by the blood of the prophets of Baal—" Bring them down to the torrent Cison and there let them all, one by one, be put to death "—such was the order of the man of God. And the people were watchful that the command of the Prophet should be followed to the very letter.

Terrified by the scene that they had witnessed on the Mount, aware that death was the certain lot of each, their cowardly hearts cried out for mercy, and they feigned a sincere repentance—but it was all in vain, the measure of their iniquity was filled up, for they had

done their best to expel from the hearts of the chosen people the worship of the God who alone had a claim to men's homage and obedience. The people, whom they had deceived by their trickery and their incantations and spells, now stood in judgment against them, and they were to be their executioners. From the rocks above the torrent their miserable bodies were cast down, and those who were not killed by the fall were stoned to death, as the Law directed. Their mangled bodies lay bruised and bleeding until the rain should come and sweep them into the swollen waters of the Cison, thence to be swallowed up in the waves of the Mediterranean.

The king had lost all his arrogance. He was now a cowering object on the rocks that overhung the torrent wherein the prophets of his wife had found bloody graves. The drama that had gone on since his arrival on Carmel had proceeded apace, and one scene succeeded another—each scene more terrible, more awe-inspiring, than the one that preceded—until he had lost all knowledge of his dignity as king, and could only recognise himself as the betrayer of the traditions and the offender against the Law of the people of God, whose anointed king he had been, but whose interests he had sold to the woman, his wife. Kings of Juda and of Israel had been taken to task by the holy men who were the "watch-dogs of the Lord," but seldom had any of them received such a rude awakening. He was prepared for the worst; assuredly, his crime had been far more criminal than that of the prophets, and he could not plead the ignorance and the fanaticism of Jezabel, who had been brought up in an atmosphere so different from his. Justice seemed to point out the only one way to deal with the traitorous king, and there was present the very man who would not hesitate to do the Will of the Lord.

For Elias this miserable being, who called himself king, had a significance that spared him the punishment which he deserved. He was still the anointed king of the Israelites, and it was the wish of the Lord that he be spared to another time. It was the decree of the Lord God that he should live to amend his life and lead Israel aright after what he had seen on Carmel. The good God would give him the grace because of the people He loved, but time only could tell would the grace of the Lord be responded to—such was the long-suffering spirit of the Lord for Israel.

CHAPTER XIX

MOUNT CARMEL

Henceforth the mount on which this manifestation of mercy and love on the part of the God of Israel for His hitherto renegade people was to be sacred in the eyes of every one of the children of the chosen people. This sanctity it was to carry even into the days when the Christian Church had happily usurped the empire of paganism, and the faithful followers of the Messias would hold its memory as a sacred treasure second only to Thabor and Sinai.

The summit on which the fires of heaven had glittered, and gleamed, and eaten up the sacrifice of the Prophet in proof that " the Lord He is God," dared not be polluted with the blood of those who had tried issue with the man of God in an audacious and blasphemous spirit; hence, the words of the Prophet had rung over the hill-side: " Take the prophets of Baal and let not one of them escape. And when they had taken them, Elias brought them down to the torrent Cison, and killed them there." Thus it was that Carmel was spared the profanation of their undoing on its now doubly sacred heights. The prophets of Baal and those of the groves were carried right willingly by the crowds present down to the waters of the Cison, scanty though those waters must have been at the time. There, they met the fate they had so richly deserved.

During the years when the people were journeying to the Land of Promise, it was the custom to take malefactors who had merited the penalty of death, outside the camp, and there, away from the usual dwellings,

they were stoned to death : this was specially the penalty for those guilty of any kind of blasphemy or idolatry. Later on, when the people had begun to inhabit the cities and the walled towns, it was likewise customary to convey outside the limits of the city, or town, all who were judged worthy of death. It seems quite probable that the Prophet had this in mind when he ordered the false prophets to be carried to the Cison, ere the sentence of death should be inflicted on them. It is not unlikely that many of them were hurled from the mountain's brow down the steep sides of the river and, there, were dashed to pieces. In whatever way their deaths were accomplished, one legal aspect of the code of the Israelites was faithfully observed—their blood was shed outside the limits of the holy Mount of Carmel. We know that at this particular part of the river, its banks are very rugged, and in some places studded with rocky protuberances. During the drought there was not sufficient water to cover completely the bed of the river; hence, the ill-fated prophets whose bodies were mangled on the stones lay in a ghastly heap—a terrible sight for the people. All signs of the carnage should be removed with the coming break in the drought, for the waters descended with remarkable swiftness when the rains brought the torrents from the sides of Carmel and the Samarian range, as well as from the Galilean hills.

The Cison, long before it became associated with the great Prophet of Israel, had already found its place in history. There, in one of the marshy plains that can be found close to the banks of the river, did Sisara, the chief of the army of Jabins, come to an untimely defeat, although he had with him the famous " nine hundred chariots of iron bristling with scythes." Deborah, the prophetess, had foretold this defeat—if Barac were to take up arms against the tyrants of the

people of God—" I will bring unto thee in the place of the torrent Cison Sisara, the general of Jabins' army, and his chariots and all his multitude, and will deliver them into thy hand." As the Lord had promised by the word of Deborah, so Barac led the men of Nephtali and the men of Zabulon, and thus the weak triumphed and the mighty fell. The two great rivers that form the Cison meet, and then part to meet again, thus forming in their course dangerous and consequently treacherous morasses. The luxuriance of the verdure between the two arms of the river during the times of the rains makes those places particularly deceptive. The Cison winds around the Mount of Carmel, and is a kind of boundary line that separates the mount from the plain of Esdrelon. Swollen, particularly in the rainy season, by a multitude of minor rivers, or rather streams, it makes its way northwards, keeping close to Carmel, and, finally, empties itself into the Mediterranean, or more accurately, into the Bay of Accon.

We must, before we take up the story of Elias, refer briefly to this Mount of Carmel that plays such a part in the history of the Prophet to whom we have given the title ," Prophet of Carmel." Not only in this affair of the stupendous manifestation of the Lord in his favor, but in the subsequent events of his career, and particularly in his association with the *filii prophetarum*, who are said to be the legitimate spiritual progeny of the man of God, Carmel figures in such a manner as to demand special reference.

The first mention of Carmel brings us back to the years of the twilight of history and legend. Ages before the Hebrew gazed on the sacred Mount, the Phœnician sailor, as he wended his watery way to other regions, bade a sad farewell to the heights which he thought were the home of the sun-god, and whereon the powerful deity who ruled the moving waves and the solid earth

dwelt in a mysterious manner; on his return from the distant shores, he raised reverent eyes to him who ruled the destinies of his fatherland—a land blessed with those magnificent peaks that rose so proudly from the ocean's edge—a worthy home for the greatest of deities.

Later, Carmel fell into the hands of the chosen people, when Josue conquered Jachanan. Amongst the names listed by Holy Writ of the kings slain by Moses and Josue, we find the name Jachanan—" The king of Cades one, the king of Jachanan of Carmel one." The conquest of Carmel must have been nearly the last in the order of time, for it could scarcely be the last in the the order of importance. It became the inheritance of the tribe of Issachar—with the exception of towns around the base of the mountain which were allotted to the tribe of Manasseh. After the schism of Jeroboam, the faithful Israelites raised an altar to the God of Israel on the summit of the mountain. This is apparently the altar spoken of in the Book of Kings, which Elias is said to have restored—" he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been broken down."

Biblical scholars have not agreed as to the precise meaning we are to give to the word " Carmel." It has been variously named " the fruitful field," " the domain of the gods," and " the garden on the beautiful hill." Perhaps, with a touch of mysticism, it has been called " the circumcision of the Lamb," " the tender Lamb," and " the knowledge of the circumcision." Whatever be the true significance of the word, it must be confessed that from its appearance to-day any of those appellations could be easily applied to it. One of the greatest English poets sings of it—" Carmel ! thy flowery top perfumes the skies." This pithy and brief description may be over-exaggerated, nevertheless, it is not without its solid foundation, for—" there is no mountain in or around Palestine that retains its beauty as Carmel does."

Consequently, Carmel has seized on the perfervid imagination of the children of Israel, just as, formerly, it usurped the reverence of the Phœnician fishermen.

When the Hebrew poet wished to convey the strongest impression of what deep desolation was, he spoke of "the desolation of Carmel." No picture of things to be dreaded could be better painted than—"The Lord will roar from Sion and utter His voice from Jerusalem: and the beautiful places of the shepherds have mourned and the top of Carmel is withered." And it is thus the prophet would express the climax of utter hopelessness—"The land hath mourned and languished. Libanus is confounded and become foul. And Saron has become as a desert: and Basan and Carmel are shaken." When the garden-mountain suffered in any way, all hope seems to have died in the heart of the child of Israel. Its rocky cells and its shady glades give to Amos one of his most powerful similes—"And though they be hid in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them away from thence. And though they hide themselves in the depth of the sea, there shall I command the serpent and he shall bite them." Although much must be conceded to the poetic fancy of the prophet, nevertheless, we cannot but marvel at what must have been the copious vegetation of those wooded heights in the day of Carmel's glory.

That part of the Mount of which we treat in connection with the Prophet is one of the most prominent points in the range that runs for about fifteen miles across the northern part of the Holy Land, terminating in the bold promontory that juts into the Mediterranean and towering for close on six hundred feet above its waters. Farther south, the range reaches the height of seventeen hundred feet. The point of most interest to us is the south-eastern slope, where the range overlooks the verdant plain of Esdrelon, for it was there the

great sacrifice was accepted by the Lord. It seems quite probable that there, too, was the usual dwelling of the Prophet; and it was from this point that he beheld the little cloud " like to a man's foot " arise from the waters of the Mediterranean. Consequently, the most sacred part of the range is the south-eastern slope of this northern promontory. To-day, the traveller is shown by the monks, who have returned to their ancient home, " The Grotto of Elias," close to which has been erected a magnificent Christian church. The foundations of this church are raised over the oldest of all shrines to the Blessed Virgin. Lower down the mountain-side is the " School of the Prophets." It is evident that everything in the neighborhood speaks of the mighty Prophet of the God of Israel. Tradition would reject completely our explanation of the source whence Elias got the water for the sacrifice on the Mount. In this neighborhood, that is to say, in the northern promontory, is pointed out the " Fountain of Elias," which to-day rushes forth clear as crystal from the mountain-side and overflows the rocky basin into which it pours.

A present-day description of the Mount will give us a fairly good idea of the past history of the place—" The mountain is composed of hard limestone. The caves are very numerous and are formed in the sides of the hard rock. On the north-eastern side, igneous rocks break out from a basalt formation. The vegetation is very abundant, and the earth still holds the appearance of rich garden soil. . . . . Most of the ridge is covered with thickets of evergreen. Besides pine, its most common trees are the prickly oak, myrtle, lentisk, carob, and olive. Carmel is remarkable for its profusion of aromatic plants, and wild flowers. Its woody heights are tenanted by roebuck, leopard and wild cat." The Carmel of to-day is of interest to us only in so far as it guides us to a closer view of what was once the glory

of the people of Israel. In gazing on the ruins of this famous mountain we may realise the beauty that inspired the Hebrew poets and the glamour that enticed the spiritual giants of ancient Israel to leave the world and dwell on the mountain heights—although for ages that beauty has fled the sacred mountain and the glamour scarcely lingers in its now silent caves.

It is at once apparent that our reference to the variations in the height of the range makes the scene described in the Book of Kings very real. Exactly at the place located by tradition for the great sacrifice, it is possible to stage a scene such as that in which are represented the altar and the contending parties, whilst at a distance from this place there is space enough for the gathered Israelites, who could see and hear all that was of interest to them, and from which they could easily pass to help the Prophet when called upon. A traveller to the sacred Mount tells us—" 'The altar of sacrifice,' called also by other titles, is pointed out on the south-east corner of the ridge in this neighborhood," and then he adds—" Its position at the south-east point of the ridge easily allowed the altars thereon to be seen by Achab and the priests and the people who stood on the wide upland sweep close beneath it. Not far from it is a well, always supplied with water, even in the driest seasons. It was probably from this well that all the water was obtained for the trench around the altar and for the thorough saturating of the offering."

Elias does not seem to have lost any time in impressing on the mind of the king and of the assembled people the greatness of the victory, for the event was, indeed, sufficiently impressive, and to speak of it in merely human phrases would not have been emphasising the obvious, but should have been a very poor addition to an event that needed no aid of man to point its moral. As if unaware of the mighty happenings that had come

to pass at his word, the man of God turned to the defeated king, who was trembling for the things that might happen at any moment, and said—" Go up and eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain." How different was this kindly admonition to the sentence of condemnation which he was expecting! The events had followed one another so rapidly and with such interesting sequence that the king had lost all idea of time. Now that the end had come of the great contest, he began to feel the effects of the long watching and the want of food. Who could think of eating or drinking in the presence of such momentous occurrences? The sense of utter and complete defeat oppressed him and served to make his other physical sufferings more intolerable. Welcome, in all truth, was the invitation given to the king, dispelling, at least for the time being, the horrid nightmare that had descended on him after the issue of the trial had come. It has been well remarked that " suspicion haunts the guilty mind," and it was no easy matter for the king to shake off the unpleasant feeling that, since the prophets of Baal had met with due punishment, he could not expect to escape with impunity.

Achab and his retinue ascended to the higher plateau, where his attendants had prepared for him a much-desired repast. His return to an easier state of mind was assisted by the hope held out to him that rain, the universally-craved rain, was soon to come. He who had kept his word for three years and more, was not likely to prophesy anything that was not destined to come to pass, so the words lingered lovingly on his ears, " for there is a sound of an abundance of rain." The enthusiastic declaration of the multitudes on the Mount that " the Lord He is God "—a declaration that at first had stricken terror into his guilty soul—was now a great comfort to him, because in it he saw the end of the

present anger of the God of Israel against the kingdom. The Prophet, whilst not binding himself to anything definite, had almost promised the opening of the heavens, and now there was, as far as he, the king, could judge, no obstacle to the desired result.

Charitably thoughtful of the condition of the worthless king, the Prophet had no time for his own pressing troubles, and, surely, they were many, seeing that he had concluded a long journey before he undertook the labor attendant on the contest with the prophets of Baal. It would be idle to say that the man of God did not suffer very much mentally during the time of the trial, buoyed up even though he was with the magnificent faith that was his characteristic. He was doing a mighty work, and doing it alone, and that he felt this loneliness one cannot doubt, for he refers to it more than once. Conscious of whence he got the power to do such great things, he repairs to the higher peaks of the mountain, and, there, he sinks down in humble adoration to the God of Israel, whose cause he had so successfully pleaded before the king and people—the God who had not forgotten him in the hour of trial. He assuredly required some little rest for his body, but he would not listen to the promptings of nature until he saw the rain falling on the parched fields of his fatherland. Away up on the mountain's brow, far away from the faces of men, undisturbed by their society or their conversation, he would await the Will of his God—" Elias went up to the top of Carmel."

The height to which the Prophet ascended to be alone with his God was not by any means the highest peak of Carmel, although the Sacred Writer speaks of it as " the top of Carmel." It was, however, high enough to view the placid waters of the sea that laved the sides of his beloved Mount. The Prophet felt that it was good to be there where he could see the great

works of God, works that appealed to him as they did to no other in the kingdom of Israel—the mountain-tops in all their glory! the sea in all its wonders! the parched and arid plains that in a few short hours should proclaim the glory of God even louder than the sea or the mountain! This, indeed, was his own intention in ascending the sacred Mount, but the God of Israel had another and quite a different purpose in suggesting to the weary Prophet to ascend still higher.

Where the king and his retinue were feasting their tired bodies was some distance from the point on which the Prophet had gone to pray and commune with God. Neither had he gone to the height on which was standing the altar of the sacrifice. This much we can conclude from the words of the narrator in the Book of Kings. Elias was able to view from his height scenes that the king had never dreamt of, and was never destined to behold. The crowd on the mountain of sacrifice was not to be privileged to gaze on the scene that the man of God beheld from his lonely peak.

The manner in which Elias prayed to his Creator is noted in the narrtive, for we are told—" Casting himself down upon the earth he put his face between his knees." The ordinary positions taken by one offering prayer to the Deity are mentioned, here and there, in the Old Testament, as well as in the New, and may be briefly stated as standing, kneeling, prostration. Whilst standing with head erect or humbly inclined, the arms were extended by way of supplication. Whilst kneeling, the arms might be extended and the face might be lowered until it was practically between the knees. This latter mode seems to have been the manner of making prayer adopted by the Prophet. It would best accord with his tired and weakened body. It would best express the humility in the heart of him who had gazed upon such manifestations of trust given to him by the God of

Israel, and who knew thoroughly well how unworthy he was of this confidence, just as he knew how unworthy the people were of that wonderful expression of the continued guidance of the Lord.

Warned by an interior voice, he had sent his attendant to a still higher eminence, from which the boy could see with ease the Mediterranean Sea. "Go up," said the Prophet, "and look toward the sea." Naturally, he was anxious to behold the beginnings of the promised rain, although he never doubted the fulfilment of the words of the Lord in regard to the breaking of the drought. The attendant did as the Prophet desired him; it seems to have been all in vain, for the looked-for rain showed no signs of coming—"And he went up, and looked and said: There is nothing." The Prophet then had recourse to the number that has been always connected with sacred events—"And again he said to him: Return seven times." In this phrase of the man of God we are convinced that there was more in the coming scene than a mere breaking up of the drought. It is thus the sacred narrator tells the simple tale of the coming boon to the land of Israel—"And at the seventh time: Behold a little cloud arose out of the sea like a man's foot."

The fact that the Prophet had told the boy to ascend for "seven" times has given occasion to some speculation as to the meaning of the vision observed on the "seventh" going-up of the boy. The number "seven" has the signification of fulness, perfection, universality. It is a number that is often used in the religious and civil life of the Hebrew people. In the opening pages of man's history we read—"And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done." In the sacred ceremonies—for example, in the consecration of Aaron and his sons, and likewise in

the consecration of an altar—" seven " days are taken as a mystical time; in the offering of the victims for the sacrifice seven of the same species are commanded. The famous candlestick of the chosen people had its seven branches, and the prophet tells the Lord—" Seven times a day have I given praise to Thee for Thy judgments." Thus, through the whole history of the people of God this number " seven " has a special signification beyond its mere numerical value. In the New Dispensation the mysticism still adheres to the number, for we find in St. John mention of " seven stars," " seven candlesticks," " seven lamps," " seven angels," " seven churches," etc. Rarely is the number used in the Old or the New Testament with its ordinary signification of " seven " units. Not without reason, then, do the commentators look for some mystic meaning in the " seven " visits to view the distant sea.

On the seventh visit of the boy to the higher level, he saw arising from the ocean a little cloud which, for some reason, seems to have attracted his attention, and accordingly he announced to the man of God, engaged in his communion with his Lord, what he had observed in the distant waters. The Prophet arose from his posture of adoration and prayer and at once he went to where the boy was standing. With eyes trained to see things as they were in relation to his mission of preparing the people for the coming of the Messias, he gazed upon wonders that so far no earthly eye had been privileged to behold. He wished to be alone in that moment, so he turned to his attendant and said—" Go up and say to Achab : Prepare thy chariot and go down lest the rain prevent thee." The boy left his master and went on his errand. Away from all eyes and standing alone on the brow of Carmel, the Prophet turned to look intently at the little cloud which had taken the shape of a " man's foot." Nowhere can we find a better

explanation of the vision gifted to Elias than in the traditions of the monks of Carmel. One is not obliged to accept that explanation under any penalty whatsoever, nay, more, one may freely reject the fruits of the meditations and the interior lights granted to those holy men who have followed the example of their "Founder and Father." Nevertheless, the spiritual-minded will turn with a kind of satisfaction to the details given by those men of that vision which Elias saw from the holy Mount. We proceed to give the explanation as found in the Annals of the Carmelite Order, for we believe this chapter should be wanting in fulness if it were omitted. Herewith, we give the interpretation of the vision that arose to the eyes of the Prophet when he stood gazing at "the little cloud arising from the sea like a man's foot."

Wearied in body with the long journey and the attendant fatigues of the contest with the false prophets, troubled in soul at the thought that the people of God might again become outcasts, he prayed from a heart profoundly moved by the mercy and love of his God. In his supplications, again and again, the thought came—when should there be an end to this backsliding of the people? when would the people be faithful to Him who was so faithful to them? when would He be able to call them His people, as they were able to call Him their God? Through his soul there came a great wave of contentment and peace, like the stillness and calm after a storm. From this gladsome state he was aroused by the voice of the boy who had come to summon him to the place where he had kept vigil at the command of his master. The boy does not seem to have uttered any word as to what he had seen, but appears to have contented himself with merely pointing out "the little cloud" on the bosom of the ocean.

We do not know how long the vision lasted. We

only know that such happenings may be of quite a long duration or they may be only a passing scene. But whether it be for a long time, or for the moment, the effects are the same. The vision is perfect in so far as the Lord desires, and the details are not dependent on time or place. We know that the Prophet having gazed for a moment turned to his attendant and said to him, as if desiring to be alone: " Go up and say to Achab." In the moments that followed, the vision may have been vouchsafed to the Prophet, if it had not been already before his gaze.

The " little cloud " was the child of the sea, but it had qualities that the sea did not possess; that is to say, it was able to ascend upwards. The waters of the ocean should have been useless to cool and give renewed vigor to the parched lands of Israel, and this is what the little cloud was destined to do. It drew from the ocean its waters, no longer saline, and from the atmosphere around what was best to heal and vivify, to give strength to increase, and power to multiply—its mission was to make the land of Israel a garden for the people then sojourning in the shadow of death because of the want of rain and dew. The transition for the mind trained in the school of spirituality and accustomed to see in the ordinary occurrences of life the Hand of God, was an easy one, indeed. The " little cloud " became a representation of the Mother of the Messias, the parched land of Israel was poor human nature before the coming of Him who was to undo the primal curse.

Those followers of the Prophet who have striven to dream his dreams and to live his life tell us that in the " little cloud " the man of God saw the humble Maid of Nazareth, and with that vision came the assurance that all his work was not to be in vain, for one day all should be well for the men who had fought the good fight; one day Israel would find its place amongst the

kingdoms of God; that he was one only of the warriors who had fought, and who still would fight, for the coming of the kingdom of the Messias. A sweet vision, indeed, for the zealous son of the God of Israel—especially when he was fighting against such odds and in such disheartening conditions. One can pardon the pious tradition that is found in the Annals of Carmel, that there, on that very spot, the Prophet erected a sanctuary to the Mother of the Messias yet to come; that there, on that very spot, she of the holy calling, when in the flesh, would one day stand; that there, on that very spot, from which he had seen the vision, followers of her Son would erect the first Christian sanctuary to the Blessed Mary; that there, on that very place, should stand the beautiful church which the traveller sees to-day when he follows in the footsteps of the pilgrims who love the memory and visit the home of the greatest of all the Prophets of God. If in their holiest moments those "sons of the prophets" have tried to weave the life of the "Founder and Father" after the manner of the life of God's Mother, who can blame them? Dreams like these are so holy and so sweet that one does not care to examine into their probability, or their historical worth.

CHAPTER XX

AFTER THE STORM

The boy left the Prophet contemplating the wondrous things that he could discern in the little cloud that gradually arose from the distant waters, and made his way to the near-by height upon which the king and his retinue were impatiently awaiting the fulfilment of the promise made by Elias. The king did not dare to leave the sacred Mount before he had seen the signs of the coming storm. How could he meet his fierce consort after the slaughter of her protegees, the false prophets? It was no easy matter to break the news of their utter defeat by the very man whom she had sworn to put to death, and whom she regarded as her mortal enemy, as he certainly was the recognised champion of Israel in all that pertained to its God and its religion. The further news that the servants of her god Baal had suffered death at the hands of the people, instigated to the slaughter by Elias, was information that should at once place him in the worst light with her whose anger he dreaded more than he feared the displeasure of the God of his Fatherland. He had been present at the undoing of the wretched prophets and had not raised one word of protest; indeed, he more or less agreed—at least externally—to the just retribution that fell to the lot of the prophets of Baal. It seemed so difficult to explain to one who had not gazed upon the terrible events that preceded the destruction of the friends of Baal. To him who was there it was an easy matter to understand the result of the trial, but how was he to make it appear in its proper light to her who had not

seen the miserable defeat of the one side, and the mighty triumph of the other, and the sanction that the God of Israel had given to the cause of Elias? There was, he believed, one consolation remaining to him in this coming meeting with Jezabel, he would be the harbinger of the glad tidings of the coming rain; his wife had seen the sufferings of the people and had been a participatrix in the inconveniences attendant on the prolonged drought which the prophets of Baal were powerless to end—either by their sacrifices or their incantations—consequently, she could not resist the pleasure experienced by everyone in the kingdom at the appearance of the rain. It would be, then, when the long-desired water was falling from the appeased heavens that he would enter the presence of Jezabel—surely a goodly introduction, surely something to turn aside her wrath at the defeat of the god of her fatherland, especially when she should have learned that Elias was the master of all.

" And while he turned himself this way and that way, behold the heavens grew dark, with clouds, and wind, and there fell a great rain." Achab did not doubt the word of the Prophet, although it was not declared directly to him that the end of the drought should be immediately. He well knew that the man of God was seemingly all-powerful with the God of Israel, Who had shown in no uncertain manner that in His Hands was the power to rule the wind, and the storm, and the rain; nevertheless, he would not move until he had seen with his own eyes the first signs of the coming storm. It was not so much a want of belief as a fear to enter the presence of his wife before he had with him the best of all protections from the fierce and dominating daughter of the priest of Astarthe, namely, the fact that Elias, who had done to death her priest-friends, had opened the heavens and was giving to the fields of Israel

the life-giving stream. No wonder, then, that "he turned himself this way and that way," for he wished to have no question even as to time—no mere promise of the future. The tokens of the coming storm were those to which he was accustomed; and he knew he could not be deceived, for the air grew warm and heavy, and the light of the sun was darkened, only a pale yellow ray broke through the gloom. The sand of the desert and the dust of the fields were hurled around and around until they, too, became a part of the heavy-heated atmosphere, thus making the darkness more profound. The wind, moaning and threatening, reached the heights of the sacred Mount, and with a murky gloom it shut out from the vision of the king and his retinue the sights that lay beneath. The pine and the palm on the heights began to toss their heads in wild confusion, and the lesser trees bent and creaked under the stress of the fierce blasts that swept even the mountain-top. All this was sweetest music to the ears of the king, and still he awaited until "there fell a great rain." The little cloud from the ocean had gained the mastery over dust and sand and wind—all of which gave way to the welcome rain. Scarcely had the first large drops of rain fallen on the "top of Carmel" when Achab was on his way to meet the queen in Jezrahel. Courage had come to his weak will at the first appearance of the realisation of the promise of Elias—"And Achab getting up went away to Jezrahel."

The king and his followers had no time to lose, else their progress to the city should be both difficult and dangerous. In the preceding chapter we have alluded to the morasses along the valley of the Cison, which is called the "Valley of Esdrelon or Jezrahel." Many mishaps had happened to strangers who knew naught of the way. The course of the king must have been along the banks of the river, for it zig-zags from the point

where the contest took place almost to the very gates of the city. The plain stretching from the Mount of sacrifice to the region lying under the city is drained by the river Cison. When the rains came and the river was augmented by the numerous streams that rushed down the mountains in the neighborhood, the waters tore their way to the Mediterranean in a massive and turbulent flood that no one could cross, for at times even the fords were covered over by the onrush of the waters. Such, evidently, should be the state of the river when the rains had fallen for a time; hence, the warning given to the king by the Prophet, who knew every inch of the ground to be passed over, for it was more or less his very homeland.

The queen was at Jezrahel, and not in the royal palace in Samaria. She may have accompanied the king as far as this city in his quest for water; but, apparently tired of the monotonous search, or, it may be, indignant at the vacillation of the king, who was quite prepared to make terms with the Prophet, she would not accompany him any further. A very important consideration to be remembered is that Jezrahel, owing to its peculiar situation, was more likely to have some reserve of water than was Samaria. In any case, the queen had her magnificent palace there, and it seemed to be one of the favorite places for residence when she was not in Samaria, the capital of the kingdom.

Jezrahel was one of the oldest cities of the kingdom and, as such, had given its name to the great plain that lay to the south-east side. This plain is better known under another form of the same name; that is to say, Esdrelon. Perhaps it would be better to surmise that both plain and city took their name from the wells that abounded in the neighborhood of the city and were likewise to be found, here and there, in the fertile plain which lay ensconced between the mountains of Gelboe

and Carmel and Samaria. It was in this plain that the armies of the Israelites, as well as the armies of their enemies, were wont to camp, owing to the plentifulness of the water—so necessary to a great army. Before their contest with Gideon, the armies of the Madianites and the Amalecites rested in the valley of Jezrahel. It was in this plain that the forces of Barac, although so few in comparison with those of Sisara, defeated decisively the powerful and well-equipped army of the tyrant. Although it was a great camping-ground for armies, it was not on such plains that the Israelites were accustomed to wage war with their attackers. Owing to their poor equipment in the matter of horses and chariots, they preferred to meet the enemy on the hills, where the horses and the scythed chariots were unmanageable. Hence, arose the saying that we meet with in historical treatises: "The gods of the Israelites fight in their favor only in the hills."

From being a mere watering station for men and animals, the place became a large city, often frequented by travellers. It was, however, in the reign of Achab that it attained to its most prominent place in history. Jezabel appears to have taken a special fancy to the place, and so prevailed upon the king to make it a royal residence—an honor it retained until Jehu, enraged by the conduct of the queen Jezabel, then an old woman, deluged it with the blood of the children and of the officials of Achab. The situation of the city was well chosen, for it was placed on a high hill, and so commanded the surrounding portions of the country. Thus Jezrahel, in a special manner, could be called "the guardian of the plain of Esdrelon"—placed, as it were, in an angle of the famous plain, it was as a kind of sentinel. It was the only city of importance in the neighborhood, for the defence of a city on the plains was a thing next to impossible, especially as the Hebrews had not the

required means to defend such places. Jezrahel, however, was, owing to its elevated condition, quite capable of defence.

That the neighborhood of the city was remarkable for its fertility is apparent from the narrative contained in the twenty-first chapter of the Third Book of Kings, wherein we have the account of the vineyard of Naboth, which the king desired very much, and for which he offered the owner either an exchange of vineyards or the worth of it in money, because it adjoined the gardens around the house of the royal mansion. According to this account, there were other vineyards just as productive as the vineyard of Naboth, and one of these the king was prepared to give in return for the desired property.

Achab built in the city a famous palace, which he adorned in true oriental style, and, not content with the grandeur of his royal abode, he erected close by the ramparts of the city the wonderful " House of Ivory "—probably so called because its external superfices was adorned with this precious material and, probably, also its furniture was encased in the same precious material, after the manner of the age. It is at this kind of luxury Amos hurls his malediction—" And I will strike the winter house with the summer house; and the house of ivory shall perish and many houses shall be destroyed, saith the Lord." It was a kind of ornamentation that spoke of great luxury and of keen trading with the outside pagan regions. Not only had the king his palace, but Jezabel also had a palace built near to the walls of the city, and close by the entrance, for it was from it that Jezabel gazed down on the entry of Jehu into the city—" And Jehu came into Jezrahel; but Jezabel hearing of his coming in, painted her face with stibic stone, and adorned her head, and looked out of a window at Jehu coming in at the gate, and said: Can

there be peace for Zambri that hath killed his master?" This was an important event in the history of the city of Jezrahel, for Jehu at once understood the reference to Zambri, and he ordered two eunuchs "to throw down headlong" the queen. And the eunuchs did as they were told—" And they threw her down. And the wall was sprinkled with her blood: and the hoofs of the horses trod on her." It was then that the terrible prophecy of the man of God came to pass, for the narrative continues—" And when they went to bury her, they found nothing but the skull and the feet, and the extremities of the hands." The dogs of the city had gathered about her corpse, after the passing of the king, and eaten her flesh—" In the field of Jezrahel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezabel." The punishment pronounced on all the blood relations of Achab was the death-song of the city of Jezrahel—" So Jehu slew all that were left of the house of Achab in Jezrahel, and all of his chief men, and his friends, and his priests, till there were no remains left of him." It was in this terrible holocaust of blood that the glory of this ancient and proud city passed away.

To-day the traveller sees little or nothing of the one-time strength and grandeur of the great city. There remains a miserable village composed of some thirty shacks—miserable refuges for the miserable inhabitants. The house of the Sheik is there, but, to the gaze of the traveller, this also is an eye-sore, and is the picture of misery, crowning the little hill-side on which it sits, bereft of all dignity, a beggarly memory of the glorious past. But there is some consolation left—the traveller can see a wondrous vision of surpassing beauty from the miserable hillock—but it is, as it were, a vision of a beautiful face furrowed with multitudinous lines of care and sadness, wrinkled by the ravages of ages past.

This was the city to which the king directed his horses

when he was leaving Carmel. It was not difficult, just at that time, to pass over the Cison, for the long period of drought had made its impression on this stream, which seemed to resist all the other attempts of nature to deprive it of its waters. Elias, however, was quite right, for had the king allowed any time to elapse before he set out for the city he should surely have had many difficulties in passing the rushing, roaring waters of the angry Cison, which was certain to receive from its neighboring mountains the full measure of the rushing waters. Between Carmel and the city of Jezrahel, not a few kilometres lay, and yet the storm was at hand.

In the first interview of which we have any notice in the sacred Books, it does not appear that the Prophet had any special reverence for the king of Israel; indeed, we know this man had forfeited all right to any reverence from the true children of the God of Israel. In the second interview, we notice that the Prophet had actually attacked the king, but there had been sufficient provocation given. During all the extraordinary events that occurred on the Mount the man of God seldom thought of the king. It was only when he was awaiting the promised rain from heaven that he seemed to have come to a knowledge of the king's presence. Now, however, there is a remarkable exhibition on the part of the stern and fiery Prophet. All the old respect for the anointed king of " the chosen people " seems to have been revived; the deep love of country for which the prophetic tribe had ever been remarkable seems to have come to life in a remarkable form, and, thus, a wonderful thing happens—one that the commentators cannot well explain; one that, despite all the explanations yet offered, leaves the matter in obscurity and doubt, one that has given much mental exercise to those who have made a special study of him whom they honor as their " Founder and Father."

"And the hand of the Lord was upon Elias: and he girded up his loins and ran before Achab, till he came to Jezrahel."

The Chronicler seemed to be dubious in regard to the reasons that urged to this peculiar conduct on the part of the Prophet, so he introduces the event with a kind of explanation of the most generic type—"And the hand of the Lord was upon him"—which, doubtless, means that the man of God in this extraordinary step was under the influence of the divine power, and he did that to which he was directed by the interior voice which had so often counselled him before. It is, of course, a reason, and, indeed, the very best that could be given; for all others seem quite problematical. It was the custom, we know, amongst the Hebrews to gird their loins when they were about to make a journey. The recognised manner of wearing their outer dress was not conducive to activity. The traveller who had not adjusted his garments to give a larger amount of freedom to the legs need not hope to easily accomplish a long journey, impeded, as he needs must be, by the long, loosely-hanging garments.

The victory had been so far to the honor and the glory of the God of Israel that the warm-hearted and, perhaps, at times somewhat impetuous Prophet could see nothing but success from all points of view, even in the future of the queen. The Prophet, in this calculation, showed his humanity to a perilous degree. He had been the instrument of the Lord in every action until the present one. As we have remarked, the Chronicler was at a loss to know the real reason why the Prophet did this seemingly menial service to the king, and, at once, gives us the reason, a too obvious one, namely, that "the hand of the Lord was upon him." It was, indeed, "the hand of the Lord," and, without doubt, the Lord had in store for the fiery and impetuous Prophet a

salutary lesson. There was no intention to continue the long line of extraordinary events which had impelled the king of Israel to be the obedient, if not the humble, servant of the God of his people, from Whose service he had long withdrawn himself.

The soul of the Prophet had been moved deeply at the many things which the Lord had done for Israel; in fact, according to the sentiments now in his mind, there was no reasonable person who could, or would, refuse to believe in the mighty power of the God of "the chosen people," after these recent occurrences. The Prophet had forgotten for a moment, for surely in his less enthusiastic moments he must have remembered the history of this stiff-necked people. It would seem that for the present he was swept along with the desire to continue his triumphant course. The prophets of Baal and the prophets of the Groves had been defeated, and had been justly, though severely, dealt with. How could the queen advocate any longer the cause of the defeated and powerless gods and the miserable priesthood that attended on them? Such was the trend of reasoning followed by the Prophet. He, therefore, preceded the king in his course to Jezrahel, and he was quite prepared for the recognition on the part of the queen that the God of Israel was "the true God." He knew very well that, unless he had converted the queen, the sacrifice on Carmel might be regarded as deprived of its richest and its best fruits; whilst she was still attached to the gods of her father, the new spirit infused by recent events into Achab would not perdure so long. Should the people be exposed to another series of temptations, they would, little by little, go back to the temples of Baal and the Groves of Astarthe.

Elias in one sense was exactly performing the office to which he had been called by the Lord, for he was

now " the chariot of Israel." He preceded the king, and marked out the way by which the king could arrive in the city before the floods should prevent his course. It was a work of love for the man of God, who had conjured up in his mind rosy ideas of the future of the house of Achab. He was now directing the chariot of the king—the very office of the prophetic tribe.

The hopes of Elias were dashed to the ground; the cherished ideas faded into gloom, when the king reached Jezrahel.

" And Achab told Jezabel all that Elias had done, and how he had slain all the prophets with the sword." There was no conversion for the fierce-souled queen. She had not seen the mighty happenings on Carmel. She knew only that this Prophet of Israel had outraged her father's gods; she had heard that he had done to death the men who had sat at her table, and for whom her pagan soul sorrowed. Instead of an incitement to belief in the God of Israel, it was a feeling of intense hate with which she was inspired—a desire for full revenge crept into the soul of Jezabel. The news that Elias received was not such as he had, even for a moment, anticipated. It was a message that showed the unconquerable soul of the daughter of a line of priests dedicated to false gods. It was the prefiguring of a scene that occurred years afterwards in the Western world: the Emperor Julian threw his heart's blood in the face of the heavens and exclaimed—" Thou hast conquered, Oh, Gallilean." The words that follow in the sacred text are interesting, but awful—" And Jezabel sent a messenger to Elias, saying: Such and such things may the gods do to me, and add still more, if by this hour to-morrow I make not thy life as the life of one of them."

CHAPTER XXI

JEZABEL

Historians have never questioned the truth of the testimony that Elias has given in regard to his life and mission—" With zeal have I been zealous for the Lord God of hosts." Jezabel could with equal truth have given in just such brief form her life and mission— " With zeal have I been zealous for the gods of my fatherland." Step by step she follows in the shadow of the Prophet of fire, never failing to show an enthusiasm as great as Elias has shown, never pausing to show mercy to the enemies of her supposedly celestial friends, just as Elias did not spare the blasphemers of the God of Israel. No historian would dream of writing the life of the Prophet of Carmel without referring to his great antagonist— the wife of Achab. Repelling, indeed, is her biography, but interesting to the greatest degree are the events of her long and checkered career. Elias bequeathed to posterity spiritual children endowed with his fiery spirit and possessed of his love for the God of Israel. The progeny of Jezabel seem to have caught her fiery spirit with all its warmth and with all its enthusiasm for the gods of Tyre and Sidon. Elias hated with a mighty hate the enemies of the true God. No less intense was the hate of Jezabel for the enemies of Baal and Astarthe. When Elias stood trembling at the threat of his enemy and finally broke and fled, the woman, seemingly conquered, charged nevertheless full of vigor, and more impetuous than ever, upon her triumphant enemy, and then seeing him in flight unrelentingly pursued him. Elias, in his extremity, prayed for death

to come; Jezabel ever prayed for other opportunities to try issues with the champion of the God whom she hated. Elias had not sufficiently gauged the spirit and the character of Achab after the famous battle on Carmel. Jezabel thoroughly understood her husband and never trusted him to himself. In the presence of Elias, the king had shown at times considerable resolution and even arrogance. In the presence of Jezabel, poor Achab was nothing save an obedient and willing vassal. Teachers and preachers have ever held up for admiration Elias because of his life and mission. Jezabel has been for them the truest example of "one sold to do evil," and for whom there is not a gleam of hope, not a scintilla of mercy.

When the Saint who wrote the Apocalypse desired a name to express that which is most loathsome in the lives of men and women, he bethought himself of the name Jezabel—"But I have against thee a few things because thou sufferest the woman Jezabel, who calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce My servants, to commit fornication and to eat of things sacrificed to idols." Then follows a threat which, whether we take it in its mystical sense or in its ordinary accepted signification, shows the divine anger. The prophetic menace ends with the terrible sentence—"And I will kill her children with death." Again and again the Fathers of the Church have used the name to indicate fanatical hate, as well as inevitable condemnation. Even a passing study of the life of this famous antagonist of Elias will justify every reference of this kind, no matter how gruesome—whether on the part of the historian, or the preacher, or the teacher.

Amri, the sixth king of Israel and the founder of the Third Dynasty, was anxious to make secure the position which he had gained for the people who had recognised him as sovereign. With true diplomatic skill he

endeavored to form alliances with the surrounding peoples, knowing that at any time the hosts of Syria might descend on Israel. This was his object in uniting by matrimonial ties the kingdom of Israel with the cities of Tyre and Sidon. His son Achab, who was destined to succeed him, was given in marriage to Jezabel, the daughter of the king of those maritime cities. The name of the king was Ethbaal, or Ithobal. From a mere material point of view the alliance was an act of prudent statesmanship. From the point of view of the spiritual mission of the kingdom of Israel, nothing worse could have been conceived.

The father of Ethbaal had been, before his elevation to the kingly office, a priest of the gods, hence we need not wonder if we find that he has named his son "With Baal," or, in fuller form, "Him who enjoyed the favor of the god Baal." Ethbaal was himself a priest of Astarthe, as well as king of Tyre and Sidon. He had reigned long over these two famous and powerful cities, and had well maintained their prestige amongst the surrounding peoples. His daughter seems to have inherited not only a goodly portion of the riches that he had acquired, but also a full measure of the pagan spirit of the family. Tyre and Sidon could boast of luxuries unknown to the hardier peoples of Israel. Side by side with a life of pleasure and debauchery, the citizens showed a wonderful devotion to the gods of whom their king was a high priest. In fact, the many rites peculiar to the worship of the gods of the two cities encouraged and fomented the terrible crimes which then made those cities occasions and places of danger to the child of Israel; fearful attractions to the youth of a nation that had received a mission from the Almighty; constant menaces to the families of note who were called upon to share in the daily life of those votaries of pleasure. Under the cloak of rites and ritual, were practised the most

abominable vices to which both men and women were in those cities addicted. In many of those religious orgies women lost all their shame and men forfeited their manhood. Hence, any alliance with peoples who were given to the worship of the gods of heathendom was a danger denounced, in terms that seem to burn into the very souls of men, by the prophets of Israel. No wonder that the Hebrew Chronicler said of Amri—"And Amri did evil in the sight of the Lord, and acted wickedly above all that were before him." Doubtless, the writer had in his mind this matrimonial alliance with the "high-priest" king. Succeeding events have justified every word of his terse and bitter invective.

Historians have not refused their meed of praise to Achab for his ability in affairs of State and in his war-like enterprises, but no sane writer has dared to justify his base betrayal of the spiritual mission committed to the people of Israel. There is one only reason assigned for the treason of Achab, and that is the influence of his wife, Jezabel. When, therefore, the Sacred Page tells of Amri that "he did more evil than any of his predecessors," it is simply telling, in other words, the result of the matrimonial alliance accomplished by him, albeit in the material interest of the kingdom of Israel. This fact is emphasised in the title given to Jezabel—"the daughter of Amri." We do not forget that this phrase was at times used to signify the kinship existing between the wife of his son and him, but we are equally sure that, in this case, there was a peculiar and suggestive use of the word, because the evil that Jezabel did to the people of God was made possible by Amri.

Through the influence of Jezabel a temple was erected, in Samaria, to the god Baal, and it has been said with every degree of probability that the king of the people of God had served at the altar of this heathen divinity. Not content with the worship of Baal having

been installed in the capital of the kingdom, the queen also caused to be erected a temple to Astarthe, wherein the questionable rites peculiar to this goddess were frequently performed. The Chronicler of the Book of Kings narrates, moreover, that the pagan priesthood was sustained and encouraged by Jezabel, who doubtless had the sympathy as well as the support of her husband. More than once we find mentioned in history the " prophets who ate at the table of Jezabel." Not content with summoning to the capital of Israel these ministers of the gods of heathendom, she was determined that they should have no rivals in the religious rites of the people, for she began a systematic and thorough-going scheme for the extermination of the prophets of the God of Israel. Long before Elias had received the call to chastise the king and his fellow-traitors to the Lord, Jezabel had been engaged in the pursuit and slaughter of the servants of Yahveh. Her indomitable energy and zeal seized on the chastisement pronounced by Elias as an excuse for continued persecution, and then she became more intense, more malignant, when she saw the words of the Prophet realised. Undaunted by the three years' drought in the land of Israel; unconquered by the slaughter and the seeming extermination of the prophets of Baal and of the Groves, she prepares to renew with added vigor the warfare on the God of Israel. Accordingly, she throws out her challenge to him whom she rightly believed to be His representative and whose fiery zeal and whose merciless justice had raised him to be in her eyes a foeman worthy of her steel.

Such had been her success in the pursuit and persecution of the prophets that Elias in his dark moments exclaimed to the Lord—" With zeal have I been zealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant. They

have thrown down Thy altars, they have slain with the sword Thy prophets, and I alone am left : and they seek my life to take it away." This, too, was the opinion of many of the friends of the God of Israel, and judging from external appearances the words of Elias could not be contradicted. We know, indeed, from other sources, that the Lord had not been unmindful of His people, and that noble souls had dared the anger and the vigilance of the enemies of the Lord and had hidden certain servants of the one true God until such time as the storm had passed and they should be able once more to serve Him in public. This was, however, unknown to Elias and his followers at the time.

There have not been wanting apologists who would defend, or at least extenuate, the unholy zeal and unrelenting ferocity of the wife of Achab, but not even one can be found who would suggest the least excuse for her conduct in the affair of the vineyard of Naboth. It is unquestionable that the conduct of the king is far more despicable, if less revolting, than that of Jezabel. In no other event of the king's reign is his miserable weak will so glaringly apparent; in no other event is the terrible depth to which the feminine nature may descend so plainly evident. Because the man, Naboth, would not part with his inheritance the king goes into his house " angry and fretting," and then " casting himself upon the bed, he turned away his face to the wall, and would eat no bread." Jezabel comes to the aid of the king, and she " wrote letters in Achab's name, and sealed them with his ring and sent them to the ancients." And this was the tenor of the letters— " Proclaim a fast and make Naboth sit among the chiefs of the people. And suborn two men, sons of Belial, against him : and let them bear false witness that he hath blasphemed God and the king and then carry him out, and stone him to death." This was the woman's

solution of the difficulty, and it, indeed, reflects the character of the wife of Achab, whilst it is not without its lesson as to her husband, for when she orders: "Arise and take possession of the vineyard, for Naboth is not alive but dead"—the narrative tells us—"he arose and went down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezrahelite, to take possession of it."

The Lord did not make delay in manifesting, to all, His anger at the terrible deed, for the "word of the Lord came to Elias the Thesbite saying: Arise, and go down to meet Achab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold he is going down to the vineyard of Naboth to take possession of it. And thou shalt speak to him, saying: Thus saith the Lord: Thou hast slain. Moreover also thou hast taken possession. And after these words thou shalt add: Thus saith the Lord: In the place wherein the dogs have licked the blood of Naboth they shall lick thy blood." Of her who had brought about, and accomplished, the vile deed the Prophet tells—"And of Jezabel also the Lord spoke saying: The dogs shall eat Jezabel in the field of Jezrahel." When the Lord was announcing, by the words of His servant, His decree against the perpetrators of the horrid deed, He did not forget to give us the key to the miserable career and the sad ending of the king of Israel, for the Prophet adds—"Now there was not such another as Achab who was sold to do evil in the sight of the Lord: for his wife Jezabel set him on."

Achab, on hearing the terrible sentence of the Lord pronounced against him, "rent his garments, and put haircloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and slept in sackcloth, and walked with his head cast down." Not so with the indomitable Jezabel. She walked with head erect and soul untamed seeking other opportunities to dispute the sway of the God of Israel over His chosen people. Nevertheless, neither her haughty mien nor

unconquered soul could avert the awful doom that was now hanging over her and her children.

The fulfilment of the prophetic words in regard to King Achab came with unerring accuracy. He went to Ramoth Galaad to do battle with the hosts of Syria and was there grievously wounded—" And he died in the evening : and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot." And he " was carried into Samaria : and they buried the king in Samaria : and the dogs licked up his blood," for they had " washed his chariot in the pool of Samaria." Jezabel had not thus far paid the penalty of her deeds.

After the death of Achab, the power did not pass away from Jezabel, for the same ascendency which she had exercised over her husband she maintained over her children. Ochozias, the son of Achab, began to reign over Israel in Samaria, but his days, seemingly, were already numbered. We learn that " he reigned over Israel two years " only. Short as had been his career, as king over Israel, he had gained for himself an unenviable reputation. We read in the Fourth Book of Kings that " he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father and his mother," and then—" He served also Baal, and worshipped him, and provoked the Lord the God of Israel according to all that his father had done." It was, thus, that Jezabel had lived to see the fruits of her evil life reproduced in her son. She had seen that Israel was still in the power of the gods of heathendom. She had seen with her eyes the triumph of her ministers in the capital of the kingdom of Israel—the domain of the one true God—just as she had seen the subserviency of " the chosen people." She knew that all this was the work of her strong and imperious will.

Joram, her second son, was also the inheritor of some of his mother's evil qualities. Although he had been an

eye-witness to the divine decrees being carried out in regard to his father and his brother, he did not learn sufficiently well the lesson of how dear the people of Israel were to the one true God. Indeed, this seemed beyond the power or capacity of any of the progeny of the terrible queen. The record of Joram is not so dark as that of his two predecessors—" And he did evil before the Lord, but not like his father and his mother: for he took away the statues of Baal, which his father had made. Nevertheless he stuck to the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nabat, who made Israel to sin, nor did he depart from them." Although he was not a participator in all the evil characteristic of his mother, he was not to escape the doom pronounced against her children. Jehu had been anointed king of Israel to destroy the house of Achab and Jezabel, but at the sight of Joram he remembered only the deeds of his mother—" And when Joram saw Jehu, he said: Is there peace Jehu? And he answered: What peace? So long as the fornications of Jezabel and her many sorceries are in their vigor." And the body of Joram was cast into the field of Naboth, the Jezrahelite, that the prophecy of the Lord might be fulfilled for the crime of Jezabel.

The baleful influence of this woman was not to be confined to the kingdom of Israel. She seemed destined to afflict the whole inheritance of the Lord. Her daughter, who seemed to have been the possessor, in a more perfect degree than any of her brothers, of the spirit of her mother, was married to Joram, the king of Juda. So strong was the influence of Athalia over her husband that we read of him—" And he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, as the house of Achab had walked (for the daughter of Achab was his wife); and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord." Athalia seems to have had the same malign influence over her children that her mother possessed over her—

for it is written of Ochozias, the son of Joram—"That he walked in the ways of the house of Achab; and he did evil before the Lord." And the Sacred Writer does not forget to mention the source whence came his evil spirit—"The name of his mother was Athalia the daughter of Amri king of Israel." The connection between the two names, namely, Amri and Athalia, is not accurately named, unless it is intended to give an explanation of the origin of the evil that Athalia had done to "the chosen people." The subsequent career of the daughter is a significant commentary on the spirit of the mother living on in her child. In cold-blooded cruelty and in diabolical scheming she is the worthy daughter of the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon, and "high-priest" of Astarthe.

The terrible times through which she had passed did not daunt the soul of Jezabel. In her old age we find her as full of vigor as ever, laboring for the gods of her fathers, striving against the God of Israel. She had seen the decrees of the Lord fulfilled with terrible and affrighting precision; one by one she had seen her dearest friends obeying, however unwillingly, the sentences pronounced by the prophets of the Deity she hated; she could not doubt that the Hand of the God of Israel had directed the bolts that struck her husband and her son and many others of her kindred—all to no purpose. She stood as fierce and as undaunted as ever amidst the ruins created by the Will of the Almighty Master of Israel. We cannot recall any character in the Sacred Pages who approaches so closely to the spirit of him who, when he had been hurled into everlasting fires, tried to console himself with the horrible thought that "it were better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." Perhaps, like him, too, her outward actions were naught save a cloak to hide a tormented soul and the agony of unfulfilled desire. She had placed her all

on the fight and had lost. She knew that she had lost. She knew that she was defeated—miserably defeated—hopelessly defeated. But conquered she would never be! Verily, she typifies the nearest approach that paganism had to a passing triumph. It is singular that paganism has recourse to its womankind to find its highest degree of success, just as Christianity points to "The Woman" for its noblest expression of "untainted humanity."

It must have reached the ears of Jezabel that Jehu had been anointed king over Israel to exterminate the race of Achab and herself. The mission announced by the prophet sent by Eliseus was not of such a nature that it could be easily kept secret—"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: I have anointed thee king over Israel, the people of the Lord. And thou shalt cut off the house of Achab thy master: and I will revenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord at the hand of Jezabel." And the final declaration came—"And the dogs shall eat Jezabel in the field of Jezrahel: and there shall be no one to bury her."

With such a sentence hanging over her, one should expect that at least fear of some kind should seize on her womanly nature.

Jehu, newly-anointed by the prophet, had proceeded to his allotted mission. After having slain Joram, king of Israel, and Ochozias, king of Juda, he proceeded to make his triumphal entry into the city of Jezrahel. The aged queen, conscious of her crowding years and of her faded beauty, tried to make compensation for both—"And Jehu came to Jezrahel; but Jezabel hearing of his coming in, painted her face with stibic stone, and adorned her head, and looked out of a window." The palace she had chosen for herself in her younger years was close by the walls of the city and nigh to the

entrance-gate; hence, she could without any difficulty behold from its latticed windows those who were to enter and go forth.

The moment she saw the man who had killed her son, all her old spirit revived, and, filled with the pride that had reigned in her heart from childhood's days, and knowing well the consequences of her act, she addressed from her window words of deepest insult to the newly-anointed king—"Can there be peace for Zambri, that hath killed his master?" Above the clamor of the multitude, higher than the shouts of welcome to the new king, arose the voice of the aged queen. Jehu heard, and he understood, and he knew whose was the voice, even though he asked—"Who is this?" Then he addressed to willing slaves the command—"Throw her down headlong." And the gruesome story is told—"They threw her down. And the wall was sprinkled with her blood: and the hoofs of the horses trod upon her." The new king was not, however, unmindful of the honor due to one who was the daughter and the wife and the mother of a king, so, when he had refreshed himself, he gave the order to his hirelings—"Go and see after that cursed woman, and bury her; because she is a king's daughter."

"And when they went to bury her," continues the Sacred Narrator, "they found nothing but the skull and the feet, and the extremities of her hands. And coming back they told him. And Jehu said: It is the word of the Lord, which He spoke by His servant Elias the Thesbite, saying: In the field of Jezrahel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezabel; and the flesh of Jezabel shall be as dung upon the face of the earth in the field of Jezrahel, so that they who pass by shall say: Is this that same Jezabel?"

CHAPTER XXII

THE FLIGHT OF THE PROPHET

All who had witnessed the wonderful supernatural manifestations on Mount Carmel were deeply impressed and, doubtless, all had experienced a true conversion of heart. We have no reason to question the change in the heart of King Achab. Accompanied by the swift-running Prophet, he reached Jezrahel and immediately sought out the queen, to whom he related the events that had followed on his meeting the Prophet. Easily moved himself, he believed that the queen could not resist the strength of the evidence offered by so many in regard to the supremacy of the God of Israel. The narrative fell on ears that were anything save pleased. The effect of the news told by the king, whilst yet under the spell of the recent happenings, was quite the opposite to that which he in his enthusiasm had justly expected. Jezabel left the king in no doubt as to her future opposition to the God of Israel and to His prophets. With her usual decision she announced to one and all the threat which we have made mention of in one of the preceding chapters. Those who knew Jezabel never entertained any doubt as to her sincerity. That she would immediately put the threat into action, all were convinced. In the presence of the queen, Achab lost his enthusiasm for the cause of his people's spiritual mission. On hearing the words of the queen—for they seem to have been straightway carried to him—Elias lost his courage.

When Elias sped on the way to the city before the chariot of the king, no matter how inexplicable his act

was, nevertheless, we are told that " the Hand of the Lord was upon him." Now, however, when he betakes himself to flight from the machinations of Jezabel, we are very plainly informed that he had no longer the same direct help from the God of Israel. He was more or less left to his own resources, having just as much divine help as any other person in like straitened circumstances. In the beginning of his flight, his course seems to have been dictated only by fear, for we are told—" then Elias was afraid, and rising up he went whithersoever he had a mind." The cause of, as well as the nature of, the fear that actuated Elias in this much-discussed flight has been the subject of many and varied commentaries by biblical scholars; the Fathers of the Church seem as little agreed upon the question at issue as the ordinary readers. That the fear deprived him of his usual power of accurate discernment is evident from the words of the narrator, who, however, gives us no further light on the difficulty proposed.

It seems to be the penalty of all deeply-enthusiastic natures to suffer at certain periods mental depression—more or less severe; and those attacks come usually after great exertion either of body or of mind. It is not to be wondered at that the ardent temperament of Elias, after the events on Mount Carmel had aroused every faculty to the highest pitch of perception, should suffer a period of depression, especially so because the very object dearest to the heart of the Prophet seemed farther away than ever, namely, the conversion of the king and queen and the consequent gaining to the God of Israel the people whom He so loved. In such mental states the slightest danger becomes formidable—at least in appearance; for there is an inability to collect, and arrange in their proper perspective, the many impressions that at times play upon one so circumstanced as Elias. In addition, he must have been aware

of the absence of that guiding light that had accompanied him in his really difficult battle with the king and the people. The Lord seemed to be with him throughout his difficulties, from the moment he appeared before Achab until he reached Jezrahel, and now, being left alone to struggle with the newer difficulties, he could not get his faculties to work in their accustomed quiet and prudent manner.

In such circumstances the prevailing idea is one of utter hopelessness—the vanity of all human effort, and the desire to shun everything that requires action of any kind. This is precisely the condition in which we find Elias after one day's flight from Bersabee. This, too, had been his inmost feeling since he left Jezrahel, but he had not summoned up courage to publicly express those sentiments until he was away from the haunts of men and tired—bodily as well as mentally.

In a word, the mission committed to him by the Lord had been a wretched failure, notwithstanding all the magnificent forces brought to the accomplishing of the work—at least, so it appeared to him, defeated, depressed and now fatigued. At this moment he did not discount the work of the Lord, and since failure had been, there was no one to blame but himself; and he was convinced there had been a great and terrible failure. He was, consequently, not the instrument that the Lord had set apart for this holy mission. Every occurrence, every circumstance, proved this fact.

It was no servile fear of the queen that made of Elias a coward and a fugitive. It was not any pain that Jezabel could inflict that could daunt him. Death, if it were only for Israel, or the God of Israel, was a thing to welcome rather than to shun in flight. The threat of the queen was only the last straw to make the burden insupportable and, as such, it gave a kind of lead to his subsequent movements.

Few men have the courage to remain longer than is necessary on the battlefield where they have suffered defeat; no man cares to remain gazing at the place where lie his biggest failures. Instinct and commonsense unite in the one desire and the one effort to get away from the scene of our unsuccessful conflicts, to shun the neighborhood of our slain hopes. Elias, as the Chronicler tells us, "went whithersoever he had a mind," and his mind, or rather his resolution, was to get as far away as possible from the presence of the king, and queen, and the people of Israel, so that it would be possible to shut out every memory of the wretched failures of his mission. Consequently, he leaves the kingdom of Israel and makes for Juda—"And he came to Bersabee of Juda." Not even here was he content to remain, for a still greater distance should divide him and the scene of his failure.

Recalling the history of Bersabee and its well-recognised connection with important events in the past times of the people of God, we believe it was not mere chance that directed the steps of the Prophet through Israel to the kingdom of Juda, and thence to its utmost boundary—where lay the city of Bersabee. It is quite true he "went whithersoever he had a mind," nevertheless, the divine Hand still aided the drooping spirits of the man of God, and thus directed him on the way to places where a lesson of great importance to him could be learned.

Bersabee appears very early in the history of the Hebrew people. It was here that the bondwoman, Agar, found water to give her boy Ismael to drink lest he might die; and it was here that she heard the words of the Lord saying to her—"Arise, take up the boy, and hold him by the hand: for I will make of him a great nation." From that spot whereon Agar and her boy had lain down to die arose up the heir to a mighty

nation. One cannot resist the idea that Elias was as Agar, not fully entitled by birth or position to be the champion of the traditions of the people of God, but that he had entered on his mission because of a special predilection on the part of the God of Israel. By the same inscrutable predilection had Agar become the mother of the boy who was to be "the father of a mighty nation." Agar was an Egyptian, but her child was the son of Abraham. She had been cast forth by the order of Sara, the wife of the Patriarch. The Lord had a mission for her and her boy, and, though her friends had forgotten her, He did not forget her. The memory of this event must have strengthened the Prophet in his lonely travels, and, above all, should it have been instructive if, as some hold, Elias was not by birth an Israelite.

There were other and perhaps more cogent reasons why the Prophet should direct his steps to the southern border of Juda. Bersabee had been a recognised resting-place for all travellers making for the North or for the South, on their journeys from or to Egypt. An abundance of water in the region of Bersabee had given it a fame that was as widespread as it was ancient. Indeed, it owes its name to a dispute that took place between Abimelech, the king of Gerara, and Abraham, who reproached the former for the fact that his servants "had taken away by force a well of water." Finally, to restore and to conserve peace between the two potentates—"Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech: and both of them made a league." Therefore, "that place was called Bersabee: because there both of them did swear." We need not dwell on the discussion that has arisen between scholars, namely, whether it is so named because of the oath or because of the wells there dug.

Amidst the concourse of travellers plying between the

northern and southern regions the Prophet would be safe from any notice that might make the unrelenting and ferocious queen aware of his hiding-place. The wells of Bersabee were also a centre whereat all could gain information from all parts, and naturally the news that might be current in regard to the movements that were agitating Israel—this news was consequently of intense interest to Elias. He could not believe, even now, after his recent defeat, that the mighty doings on Mount Carmel could go for nothing in the lives of those at least who had seen and heard. As to the king and his consort, he for the present evidently held very little hope of any satisfactory change of heart.

But, apart from the advantage of such place for hiding one's identity, there was a greater and a far more satisfactory reason why the man of God, finding himself in those regions, would naturally direct his steps to the city of Bersabee and desire, for a time at least, to linger in its vicinity. Bersabee was, indeed, a holy place, and its sanctity reached back to the time of Abraham. We read in the Book of Genesis that after the pact had been made, of which we have spoken in a previous paragraph—"Abraham planted a grove in Bersabee, and there called upon the name of the Lord God eternal." The Patriarch Isaac had blessed and named it thus—"Whereupon he called it Abundance; and the name of the city was called Bersabee even to this day." And it was in this very place that the Lord appeared to him and gave him the promise of future generations—"And he went up from the place to Bersabee. Where the Lord appeared to him that same night, saying: I am the God of Abraham thy father: Do not fear for I am with thee. I will bless thee and multiply thy seed, for My servant Abraham's sake. And he built there an altar, and called upon the name of the Lord." Elias was not the first of the prophets to have a great venera-

tion for the place called Bersabee, for Samuel had made his sons judges of the region when he became too old to do the work of his holy office. Bersabee was also the parting place for all who wished to leave the kingdom of Juda. It was natural that the Prophet should rest there, not only on account of its convenience, but also on account of its memories, and, too, for the inspiration that it must have had for one circumstanced as he then found himself.

The Prophet was evidently resolved to betake himself to the desert. At that time in the neighborhood of Bersabee could be conveniently found the desired seclusion; and at the same time there were not a few wadis where he might rest from the heat of the day. In the neighborhood of this desert, so-called, could be found plentiful supplies of water, which should be very necessary if he intended to make a prolonged sojourn outside the kingdom of Israel; especially was this so, now that he might not look forward to any assistance from the higher powers whose patronage he believed he had lost with the passing of his mission. He had traversed the chain of hills that sharply separates the home-dwellers and constant inhabitants from the nomad tribes that look rather to the desert as their home.

His intention seems to have been to keep away as far as possible from the society of mankind; and, the more effectually to be alone, he left in the city of Bersabee the servant who ever accompanied him, and who had been a witness of the occurrences on Mount Carmel. His pilgrimage to find out the reason of his failure was to be made in the company of no mortal. The secret of the seeming triumph of the powers of evil, if he could ascertain it, would then be his own. To know himself, to regain his mastery over his faculties, to come in touch once more with the mighty forces that once he seemed to hold in the hollow of his hand—all this meant a big

struggle, a struggle, perhaps, in which he should be again defeated. But, defeated or successful, he must be alone to keep the vigils as well as to storm and regain the heights on which he once moved.

The story of the Prophet of Fire, as told by the Sacred Chronicler during those days of trial and desolation, is brief, but at the same time it is very instructive. The picture of the strong man reduced to a miserable mass of suffering humanity, seemingly bereft of bodily strength as well as of moral courage, is given in such a way that the reader mourns for the mighty man of God who thundered the message of his Master to the fearful king and who commanded the lightnings of heaven on the Mount of Carmel—" And he went forward, one day's journey into the desert. And when he was there, and sat under a juniper tree he requested for his soul that he might die, and said: It is enough for me, Lord, take away my soul; for I am no better than my fathers." And then comes the utter collapse of the mighty chariot-driver of Israel—" And he cast himself down, and slept in the shadow of the juniper tree." It was the sleep of pure exhaustion. The troubled heart had gone on, and on, thinking not of eating, or of drinking, or of resting. Whilst the eyes of man were upon him, he was forced to keep on his feet and to move, and act, as if no great and absorbing sorrow swayed down his soul. Not even his companion, who loved him dearly and served him faithfully, must see the great collapse of the master whom he believed invincible in the work of the Lord.

Elias had rushed to the desert, which was as much his home as it was the home of the Bedouin nomads. In a sense, it was more of a home to him, for it was in the desert that he had learned to love the God of Israel. It was in the desert that he had learned the secrets of the divine Will in regard to Israel. It was in the desert that he had thought out the problems of his monastic

institute. It was in the desert that he first knew how sweet was the yoke of the God of Israel. It was in the desert that he had heaped up those great resources of strength that were of seemingly infinite service to him in his treating with his fellow-men. It was in the desert that he learned the value of prayer and mortification. It was in the desert that he received his call to deliver his message to the king of Israel. It was in the desert that he received that extraordinary manifestation of divine bounty when the birds of the air were the servants of his rocky table. It was in the desert that the Lord prepared him for the mighty work that was to be done on the Mount of Carmel. It was there he had learned the secret of hurling at the ministers of the false gods the lightning of heaven. It was there that he learned the secret that to spare the enemies of the God of Israel were basest treason. What wonder if now we find Elias in the desert—surely it is his home. As the memory of the past sweeps over him, and as he, too, becomes aware of his fall from the friendship of his Master, his soul is swept with a mighty grief, and the tired body can no longer fight the battle of nature, so the Prophet of Carmel sinks to the ground and a blessed oblivion comes to him in a feverous, troubled sleep.

Those who read the brief description given by the Chronicler will at once, and with great reverence, be reminded of another grief centuries after—the grief of the Son of Man in Gethsemane and on the Cross. It is true, the grief of the Prophet was a mere passing shadow to that overwhelming grief of the Man of Sorrows. Nevertheless, we have delicately and very remotely, if you will, a prefiguring of the loneliness and the abandonment of the God-Man in the days that preceded and accompanied His agony. At first, the Saviour wished to have His friends and attendants with Him in

the Garden of Gethsemane, but finally He went away a distance from them to be alone with His sorrows. On the Cross the words that expressed His loneliness in the great struggle are the most heart-rending of all—" My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Elias left his servant to go into the desert to bear his burden alone. When he thought that he was abandoned by the God of Israel he prayed that death might come. " Lord take away my soul," are words that afford a key to the desolation of spirit of this man who appeared to the people as a giant to do and dare for the God of Israel.

Before closing this chapter it might be well to refer to the explanation offered by Saint John Chrysostom as to the mental state of Elias during the flight above mentioned. " Elias," he writes, " could be likened to a man under the influence of wine, he was carried along hither and thither by his will faculty rather than directed by his reason and good sense. His state was not unlike to that of the vessel at sea dominated by the fierce tempest rather than by the art and the science of the pilot." To this mental and bodily state refers the Prophet Isaias—" Be astonished and wonder: waver and stagger: be drunk and not with wine: stagger and not with drunkenness "; and, again, further on in the same Book he recalls this mental state—" Therefore hear this, thou poor little one, and thou that art drunk but not with wine." Hence, according to this Saint, the Prophet was driven by the threat of the ferocious queen to seek the desert because for the time being he had lost his mental powers of accurate and proper discernment. The fact that the Prophet dismissed his servant in Bersabee is attributed to his tender feeling that the boy should not suffer in the chastisement of the master, and, perhaps, too, his idea in seeking flight alone was a return to his old habit of solitude in the desert.

Amongst the earlier commentators we find an inclination to exaggerate the consequences of a woman's anger. They even have recourse to the pagan poets to explain how terrible is the hate and opposition of the female nature. There is not a shadow of doubt as to the thorough-going hatred of Jezabel, and still less could there be a doubt of her determination to push that hate to extremes; nevertheless, we cannot think of that fear being the only or even the paramount factor in the flight of Elias. The wish expressed by Elias that death should come to relieve him from the position in which he found himself is, at the first sight, capable of an interpretation not in favor of the greatness of soul that we have already seen to be a characteristic of the Prophet. It is quite true that death at the hand of, or at the instigation of, a woman was not looked upon as a noble death under any circumstances. In the Book of Judges it is told of Abimelech—" And behold a certain woman casting a piece of a millstone from above, dashed it against the head of Abimelech, and broke his skull. And he called hastily to his armorbearer, and said to him : Draw thy sword and kill me : lest it should be said that I was slain by a woman." Reviewing other events of this time, we cannot say that death in any form had a terror for Elias. When he wished for death to deliver him from his difficulties, there was nothing in that wish that should indicate any falling away from grace. It is quite common to read in the Scriptures that death is not the worst of evils—whether physical or moral. In Ecclesiasticus we read that " death is better than a life of sorrow." And Job exclaims—" Why is light given to him that is in misery, and life to them that are in bitterness of soul. That look for death and it cometh not, as they that dig for a treasure. And that rejoice exceedingly when they have found the grave." And the appreciation of life, as the Prophet Jeremias saw it,

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is not likely to enamour anyone of life—" Cursed be the day wherein I was born : let not the day in which my mother bore me be blessed." And then, again—" Why came I out of the womb to see labor and sorrow, and that my days should be spent in confusion?"

It is difficult to understand the various attempts to ascertain the true import of what the Prophet intended by—" for I am no better than my fathers." There can be only the one solution to the difficulties proposed, namely—" those great men who have gone before me and who were giants to do the will of the God of Israel have all passed away and still the merciful Kingdom of God is wide open for the people; and their spiritual mission yet remains. Men must have thought that they were indispensable to the work of the Lord and, nevertheless, they have passed away and the God of Israel still finds instruments to do His Will. In the same way I am not necessary for the sublime mission to call Israel back to its allegiance and, when I am taken away by death, others shall arise, and shall be called to do the work far more efficaciously than I could ever do it." It is the only answer to what his inmost thoughts were suggesting to him, relying on his past performances in the struggle to save Israel. It is a kind of rebuke to any notion of pride that he might feel in the present view of his failure—a pride that could easily come to assuage his wounded feelings, for such is our human nature.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CONSOLATION AND THE REVELATION

"And he cast himself down, and slept in the shadow of the juniper tree." It is thus that Saint Jerome has named the tree under which the Prophet slept. If we follow the interpretation given by this great biblical authority, we can see, at once, the dejected state of this pilgrim to the desert. Neither of the two kinds (called juniper) that were well known in those regions in the time of the Prophet, and are, indeed, still to be seen in the parts north and south of Bersabee, could afford much shade from the burning sun that poured its rays down on the desert sands. The common kind, called the Phœnician juniper, would allow the sun's rays to beat upon any figure reclining beneath, and the second kind should be equally useless as a protection for the resting traveller. There were other disadvantages which we need not stop to recall here. No doubt, at times, but very seldom, did the juniper attain to the dimension of even small trees, but whether it were of the upright, single-stem kind or of the triangular-leaf, very little advantage could be gained by seeking shelter in the shadow of a juniper tree. Should we concede that the Prophet sought rest under such a protection, it would indicate a state of abandonment that should be more expressive than any words of how little he cared for his life at that particular time. In fact, throwing himself down to sleep in the then condition of his body and mind was a veritable invitation to a certainly unsuccessful encounter with death.

On the other hand, if we follow the later interpretation

of the word used in the Sacred Text, we shall find that the tree under which the Prophet reposed was of the nature and species of our broom-tree. This plant was very common in the region in which the Prophet was then resting. Frequently it grew to two, but rarely three, metres in height. The lower part was rough and without any leaves or soft stems, but, as it increased in height, it spread out in tender branches, green, and often laden with flowers—sometimes yellow and often white. This plant-tree could afford considerable cover from the rays of the sun because of its flowery top and its many soft leaflike branches. This broom-tree was to be found very extensively in the neighborhood of the Dead Sea, and also in the desert of Juda, as well as in the confines of the mountain of Sinai. It was akin to, but not identical with, the shrub to which it is often likened, namely, Spanish broom. In the wanderings of "the chosen people" there is mentioned a place which evidently has taken its name from the plentifulness of the shrub in that region—"And from Haseroth they came to Rethma. And departing from Rethma, they camped in Remmonphares." Under the translation "Rethma" we have the same tree-shrub indicated as in the passage describing the wanderings of Elias in the desert beyond Bersabee.

The Prophet wisely chose the shade of the shrub-tree because it should afford him a safe resting-place until his tired body had regained its accustomed strength. That the place was not ill-chosen is clear from the fact that he did not change his position after he had been refreshed and consoled by the angel. Had he taken his place under a tree such as the juniper, his first act on awakening should have been to change to another shelter better adapted for the second rest and sleep, if he had not been completely exhausted.

The sleep of the Prophet must have been a very

troubled one, because the first hours of repose that come to a body over fatigued, and to the spirit mightily troubled, are not at all refreshing, nor invigorating. The body, no doubt, struggles to regain its lost normal power and the troubled soul tries, even though often in vain, to adjust things in their proper perspective. The efforts are not always crowned with success, nevertheless, nature recuperates somewhat, and, to a great extent, something of the lost vitality and of the soul's tranquillity is obtained. The God of Israel had been watching His servant Elias and He saw that the troubles of the man were not forgotten even in sleep, so He was moved, as He ever is, at the sight of poor human nature wearied and on the brink of defeat by the lower powers of the world. He knew the value of the fiery spirit of the Prophet, but He knew, too, its concomitant weakness. It was this weakness, more than the strength, that moved the heart of the God of Israel. The Infinite Mercy was touched at the sight of the fallen and defeated hero of a few days ago, so from the Golden Gates of the Heavenly Mansions glided down one of His messengers —" And behold an angel of the Lord touched him, and said to him: Arise and eat."

Aroused from the fantastic fancies of his fevered dreams, Elias knew not where he was, nor who had disturbed his troubled sleep. It was then that the angel touched him, and with that touch came back his powers of thinking and reasoning. In a moment he knew where he was and what had brought him there, and then, gazing at his companion, he recognised one whom he had seen often in the days when he was an exile for the God of Israel, at the brook Carith. For a moment only did the celestial messenger tarry, and then winged his flight to the blessed lands whence he had come. His words had been few, but expressive of his mission— " Arise and eat."

Feeling that the time of trial had almost passed, since his old friends did not shun his company, he gazed around, and lo ! there at his side were a hearth-cake and a vessel of water. He obeyed the command given him to eat and drink. The food was not of the quality which he had received in the days of his exile at Carith, but it was more in keeping with his present condition and more suitable to the work that he had undertaken. The hearth-cake, usually, was a simple mixture of flour and water, the flour being crudely prepared : the customary preparation was to spread the dough thinly over the stones prepared for the mixture, and then it was placed on the rude fire, over which it remained until it was fit to be eaten. The mixture itself and its simple preparation remind us of the bread that is used in the great Sacrifice of the Altar. We do not wonder when we find some pious commentators calling this bread a figure of " the bread of the Sacrifice."

Partly refreshed in body by the sleep, wholly strengthened by the food given him by angel hands, all his old vigor returned to the Prophet. And now he thinks connectedly and to the purpose. He becomes aware of a great tiredness of body and a great languor of soul, and he knows there is only one remedy for these two conditions, namely, a deep and tranquil sleep, wherein neither the fatigue he had undergone nor the trouble of soul might enter. The subsequent condition of the Prophet has been expressed very vividly by the sacred narrator—" And he ate and drank : and he fell asleep again."

The old saying has much to recommend it—" The darkest hour is that before the dawn." The consolation was being prepared for the Prophet in the hours when he lay in fevered sleep, living over the terrible trials that led to his flight into the desert. When he had seen his celestial messenger, and when he had partaken of the

food and the drink that had been placed beside him, he knew that he had not lost all favor with the God in whose honor he had grown fierce and unbending, and, too, as some of the commentators would have it, a little over-zealous. It was then that a great calm had settled on his afflicted spirit, and, like a contented, tired baby sinking to sleep on its mother's breast, the Prophet sank once more to the earth and, there, protected from the heat by the flowery branches of the fragrant broom, he slept. This time it was a healthy, sweet sleep—a sleep that gave new life to his travelled, weary body, and did not refuse a sweet contentment to his once troubled soul.

From this sleep he is awakened by a friendly touch. He instinctively knows who it is that arouses him from his profound slumbers. He is not displeased to be thus summoned from his pleasant and refreshing rest. Old friendships are going to be renewed and, perhaps, once more he would be taken into the service of Him whom he had learned to serve with all his heart, and with all the fervor of his fiery soul—" And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said to him: Arise and eat; for thou hast yet a long way to go."

And then it is related that he " arose, and ate, and drank, and walked in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights, unto the mount of God, Horeb." This time he arose with alacrity, and he ate with avidity, and he drank eagerly, for he knew that he was to gird himself for a long and serious journey. For forty days he travelled, and the nights brought him no rest, for his course was directed by a power greater than anything he had yet experienced, and he knew that he must pursue his course without fear or without faltering in the way. Once more he felt that he was a recognised messenger of the God of Israel, and, that being so, he

reckoned not of the cost. His enthusiastic nature was slowly but surely awakening to life again.

The moment in which the Prophet knew that he was to go on a long journey, and that forty days and forty nights must pass ere he should break bread again, was the signal for the beginning of his new mission. He was well aware of the fact that the great Leader of " the chosen people " had performed such fast at the time when the Law was being given to the people, through his agency—" And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water; and he wrote upon the tables the ten words of the covenant." It was to this fast that Moses appealed when he recalled to the Israelite people how grateful they should be to the Lord for all that He had done for them, he, Moses, having done this fast as a means of preparation for the gift he was about to receive from the Lord. We cannot doubt for a moment that the bread given by the angel was endowed with qualities that made it, in its effects, quite different from the common bread in use. In appearance and, too, in its preparation, there may not have been any miraculous powers used, but no one could doubt of its properties being the gift of the celestial powers. Hence, many commentators see in this bread a figure of the " Bread of Angels " which was to be the food for the souls of the Christians in the days of the New Dispensation. Pursuing the idea in its mystical sense, other commentators have seen in the forty days of travel a prefiguring of the whole life of the Christian—especially as Horeb can easily be a signification for the Mount of God in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The mountain named Horeb, to which Elias directed his steps was situated at a great distance from the desert of Bersabee, but it does not seem necessary to hold that the whole forty days and forty nights were required to

accomplish the journey, unless there were long and important delays on the way. Of any delays on the way we have no mention; indeed, reading the narrative in the light of what is insinuated and weighing well all the information given, we may conclude that there were not any such delays, and that consequently he had arrived before the time mentioned had elapsed—but the next scene was not to unfold itself until the time specified in the narrative, namely, the fortieth day. Horeb was a place very sacred in the eyes of every child of " the chosen people," for it was there that the name of Yahveh was first made known to man. It was there that Moses, whilst shepherding the flocks of Jethro, saw the burning bush and was first given an intimation of the mission that the Lord intended to allot to him. Long before the time of Moses, the mount seems to have been a holy place, for Moses was given the order—" Put off the shoes from thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." And, lest any doubt should be entertained as to its previous sanctity, we are informed in the first verse of the third chapter of Exodus—" and he drove the flock to the inner parts of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, Horeb." The vicissitudes of the mountain are lost in the twilight of history and romance. It is, however, possible that even before the times of Moses the mountain was consecrated to other deities than the God of " the chosen people." There are not wanting writers who would connect the name of the place with Naram-Sin, the Chaldean conqueror, whose name expresses relationship with the Moon-god—being interpreted " Beloved of the Moon-god." The years of this monarch's reign are dated from about 3750 years B.C., and, as we know, he was the son of the mighty warrior Sargon. Although at first sight this connection may not be pleasing to us, nevertheless, we must remember

that the early Christian temples were often the deserted homes of the gods of paganism. It is, therefore, not outside the bounds of possibility that the mountain whereon the God of Israel afterwards revealed Himself was dedicated to the Moon-god of Baylon by this Naram-Sin. We are following the interpretation which makes Horeb of that time one with Sinai. We need not stop to remark that they both are parts of the same mountain-range, even as we know them, and so name them, to-day. They were to be henceforth consecrated to the memory of Moses and the chosen people. Even if they could lay any just claim to traditions more ancient, Horeb and Sinai in the popular mind recalled the events memorable in the history of the Hebrew people. These were the memories that were apt to impress Elias.

Hence, if the angelic spirit had not directed the steps of Elias, the very memories of the mount would have enticed him to the place. It was from the rocky side of Horeb that Moses drew the water to satisfy the thirsty and murmuring Israelites—"And the Lord said to Moses. . . . Behold I will stand there before thee upon the rock Horeb; and thou shalt strike the rock, and water shall come out of it that the people may drink. Moses did so before the ancients of Israel." The heights of the Sacred Mountain had a very special attraction for the wandering children of Israel, so much so that their Leader had to give them the command that he had received from the Lord—"The Lord our God spoke to us in Horeb, saying: You have stayed long enough in this mountain." It may have been that the verdant sides of Horeb were more inviting when they gazed on the "terrible and vast wilderness" not so far distant. The peculiar effect that the mount exercised over the minds of the wandering tribes is evident from the frequent references made to it by Moses. That there

was no real distinction in the minds of the narrators of the sacred events in the Books treating of the journey to the Land of Promise, when they speak one time of Horeb and at another time of Sinai, is apparent from such passages as—" Now in the ark there was nothing else but the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the Lord made a covenant with the children of Israel." Sinai was the scene of the giving of the tables of the Law. It was from the height of Sinai that the Lord spoke amidst thunder and lightning—" And all Mount Sinai was on smoke: because the Lord was come down upon it in fire, and the smoke arose from it as from out of a furnace. And all the mount was terrible." All these memories must have come upon Elias as he wended his way to Horeb. We do not think that there are any grounds for believing that, when the narrator of the events in the Book of Kings makes mention of Horeb, he had the intention of dividing the memories of two names, namely, Horeb and Sinai, for Sinai was only the highest peak of the mountain-range that was called Horeb. It was in later times that the distinction in the names became of such importance. And, thus, Horeb was the whole mountain-range, or rather the northern part specially, whereas, Sinai, the part on which the Law was delivered, was the southern part. This was the distinction generally recognised in the Middle Ages.

It would not lend any interest to the life of the Prophet if we were to enter the region of discussion occupied by the biblical scholars of to-day, in reference to the exact situation of the Sinai of the Bible and its relationship to the Horeb of which we read in the early Books of the Sacred Narratives. We are content to leave these questions to those who are better able to judge, believing that, in the solution of them, there

should be brought to light no more information on the flight of Elias. It is sufficient for us to state that Elias made his pilgrimage to the range of mountains situated in the south of the peninsula that lies between the gulfs of Suez and Aqabah. That his intention was to reach the holy mountain upon which Moses had spoken with the God of " the chosen people " and from which the Law had been promulgated, we take for granted. Whatever difficulties the modern traveller experiences as to the whereabouts of the sacred places, we may justly conclude that the Prophet of Carmel had none.

It is not our duty to record the sentiments of Elias as he neared the Holy Mount, although we experience a great curiosity in regard to them. We can, however, have somewhat of a passing idea of them when we recall that one of the most eminent biblical scholars of the day has tried to give expression to his own sentiments at the sight of Sinai, and, profoundly different as they must be from those of Elias, yet at their narration we cannot but feel deeply moved. It is after the following manner he speaks :—At the sight of this mount, triple in form and yet one in reality, all the doubts of the scholars disappear and a religious fear descends on the spirit of the onlooker. The plain at the foot of the mountain seems the very place whereon the Lord would assemble and speak to His people from the heights. There is nothing new in this impression received to-day, for Saint Silvia tells us that in her time visitors to the Holy Mount were wont to fall on their knees at the very sight of the Mountain of God. Yes, it is our duty to thank the great God for having given such harmony to His work in placing in such surroundings the granite ladder from whose height the Law was proclaimed, for having filled the souls of those below with His truth whilst the lightning flashes gleamed and glittered on the dazzling peaks, for having spoken where men must needs

listen to His Voice. Of a truth, God has here revealed Himself. Nature and history vie the one with the other as to which will cry with louder voice the name of the Lord God. Such have been the cogitations of one who viewed the holy heights, hundreds, if not thousands, of years after the Prophet stood gazing on the Mount of the Lord. What, then, must have been the sentiments of the man of God when he looked on the mount whereon his God had stood and wherefrom He uttered the truths which he, the Prophet, had endeavoured to teach to the people of Israel—even though he had seemed to fail in his mission?

Elias was still within the shadow of the great events that have endeared the Mount of the Lord to the whole world. He had no doubt, such as we may have to-day, of the exact place wherein the Lord had spoken to His servant Moses. He knew the people of God in a manner that is not given to us in these times. He was alive to the mission of "the chosen people," whereas, to-day "the chosen people" are scattered throughout the world, and their mission seems a thing of the past and a kind of fable. Need we say more to impress on the mind of our readers the solemnity of the occasion, when Elias had made his way through the desert of Tih, and broke in on the valley that surrounded the Mount of the Lord, Horeb. It was here that the real consolation was to come to Elias. It was in this very place that the newer revelation was to be granted to him. It was on those very heights that he was to see sights that hitherto had not been granted to mortal man to behold—save to him who was the great Leader and the Law-Giver of the people of God.

Before closing this chapter it would help to the information to which our readers have a right to give an extract from Professor Sayce, relative to the location of the Mount of Horeb and so of Sinai—"Numerous

attempts have been made to identify the mountain which the Israelites regarded as the scene of the first pronouncement of the Law. Most of these attempts are based on the belief that it is to be sought in the Sinaitic peninsula. The rival claims of Jebel el-Ejmeh, Jebel Umm' Alawi, Jebel Zebir-Katarina, Jebel Serbal, and Jebel Musa, have all been eagerly discussed. Jebel Musa alone can claim the support of tradition, though this does not go back further than the third or fourth century A.D., when the Christian hermits first settled in the neighborhood. The Sinai of S. Paul was still in the Arabia of Roman geography, the kingdom of which Petra was the capital.

" In the geography of the Old Testament, however, Mount Sinai was in Edom. This is expressly stated in the song of Deborah, one of the oldest products of Hebrew literature. In the Blessing of Moses the parallelism of Hebrew poetry requires that Sinai and Seir should be equivalent terms. We must then look to the frontiers of Edom and the desert of Paran for the real Sinai of Hebrew history. But it is useless to seek for a more exact localisation until the mountains of Seir and the old kingdom of Edom have been explored. Then, if ever, the Sinai of the Pentateuch may be discovered. It would seem that it formed part of a range that was known as ' Horeb,' the desert mountains, and as late as the age of Elijah it was still reverenced as ' the Mount of God.' "

We might add here that the distance mentioned in the narrative of the Prophet does not help much in the localisation of the Holy Mount, for " the forty days and the forty nights " are really not to be taken in the exact meaning of the terms as we now know them. Like many of the numbers used in the Sacred Narratives, nothing more is intended than a generic indication as to distance.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE VISION ON THE MOUNT

The great Leader of the Israelites had grown tired of, and was seriously discouraged by, the constant bickerings and murmurings of the people. The mission which the Lord had called him to accomplish was becoming too much for him, consequently he complains to the Lord that He must show His Presence in a more effective manner—" And Moses said : If Thou Thyself shall not go before, bring us not out of this place. For how shall we know, I and Thy people, that we have found grace in Thy sight, unless Thou walk with us?" The Lord knew how stiff-necked were the people whom He had chosen to be the depository of His truths—" And the Lord said to Moses : Say to the children of Israel : Thou art a stiff-necked people." He was well aware of the dispiriting work that had been allotted to His servant, Moses; neither was He unmindful of the consolation that was necessary to enable the Leader of Israelite hosts to battle successfully with the almost insurmountable difficulties arising every day—" And the Lord said to Moses : This word also, which thou hast spoken, will I do. For thou hast found grace before Me : and thee I have known by name." A greater and a more precious gift was yet to be asked by Moses from the Lord—" And he said : Shew me Thy glory." This wonderful privilege was granted to the Leader, but only could he behold that glory in the proportion that was possible to mortal man whilst yet in the flesh. Hence, the Lord made answer—" Thou canst not see My face : for man shall not see Me and live." And again He

said—" Behold there is a place with Me, and thou shalt stand upon the rock. And when My glory shall pass I will set thee in a hole of the rock and protect thee with My right hand till I pass."

According to the writings of some of the Rabbinical commentators, the place wherein Moses had taken his stand was the same cave, or opening, in the mountain-side to which Elias betook himself when he reached the Holy Mountain. This opinion has found favor with many of the Christian commentators—and justly so, for the circumstances surrounding the Leader of the " people of God " and those surrounding the Prophet were very much akin. Where could Elias have found another place so filled with such memories, redolent with such inspiration, blessed by such happenings? If in the Christian dispensation, pious souls sought eagerly for that holy place, what must have been the appreciation of the Prophet for that cave in the side of the Sacred Mount? Besides, Elias knew well the very place upon which the Leader had stood; not equally certain could the early Christian visitors be. Before the time of Moses the place was believed to be sacred, and it was precisely on account of this pre-Christian sanctuary that the pastors of flocks never permitted their animals to approach the Mount. This much we know from the pages of Josephus, who recalls the traditions of the Hebrew people.

If Elias was seeking only a place wherein he would be free from the gaze, as well as the companionship, of men, he could not have found a better resting-place than was the Mount wherein was located the cave to which were attached such memories. It was holy and not at all likely to be visited by the ordinary Israelite traveller because of its historical connections with the wanderings of " the people of God," and it was sacred from the intrusion of those who had not the faith of the

Israelite, because its ancient fame, as a home of the pagan gods, was, we may assume, known to all the neighboring tribes and, in a vague way, even to all the travellers and visitors who might pass by the way. From the point of view of solitude, and freedom from the interference of men, no matter to what religion they belonged, no better place could have been selected by Elias. From the point of view of sanctity, the desert held no holier resting-place. And its claim to reverence would not be disputed by either the Hebrew or the pagan, by the Jew or the Gentile.

Consequently, when the Sacred Narrative tells us of the Prophet—" And when he came thither, he abode in a cave," we do not hesitate to assert that the place of the abode of the man of God was in the self-same cave in which the Leader of " the chosen people " stood to see the grandest sight that his mortal eyes had ever gazed upon. It was for no other reason that the Prophet travelled for forty days and for forty nights, and ceased not in his journey, until he reached the Mount of God, Horeb. Our inference is not only logical, but the only one that could satisfy inquiring minds.

Doubtless, in that cave, although so sanctified by the past, Elias had to undergo a period of probation ere he could know the Will of the God whose aid and consolation he now sought. Just the length of the time spent in preparation to meet whosoever should be sent to speak with him, cannot be estimated. We may say that it was comprised in " the forty days and the forty nights," but as we know not what period of time these words specify, it follows that we are still at sea in regard to the time spent in the holy cave before " the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him : What dost thou here, Elias?"

It was then that Elias made his confession. Fear no longer dominated his soul. A great calmness had settled

upon his spirit, and he speaks out the sentiments that are in his heart—" And he answered : With zeal have I been zealous for the Lord God of hosts : for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant. They have thrown down Thy altars, they have slain Thy prophets with the sword, and I alone am left : and they seek my life to take it away."

At first sight, the confession seems to justify those who maintain that the Prophet had been over-zealous in his dealings with the priests of Baal on the Mount of Carmel. But it must be remembered that the Prophet, although he is speaking to the God of Israel, is not afraid to declare that all his zeal was for the Lord of hosts; consequently, we cannot see in that zeal anything sinful or blameworthy. That the Prophet, in the warmth of action, had imported too much of his fiery nature into his deeds is quite possible; still, to him it was the work of the Lord which was being done. And surely zeal, in the presence of such treachery on the part of the people and such opposition on the part of the enemies of the God of Israel, namely, the king and queen, was rather to be commended than to be condemned. No one could question the other facts stated by the Prophet, namely, that " the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant. They have overthrown Thy altars," and that Jezabel had remorselessly " slain Thy prophets with the sword." The lamentation made by him—that he alone was left—seemed to him and to many others to be quite true, because all the prophets who had escaped the persecution of the queen had been in hiding and, hence, Elias knew nothing of them, as we have already remarked. The last complaint made by the Prophet was one that he had at first been unable to view with its proper perspective. In the quiet of his cave-dwelling, his death was the last in order of importance and barely worth being mentioned—it was

thus that the journey and the solitude of the mountain had given him a just view of the cause of the God of Israel in so far as he was concerned; hence, we find as the concluding part of his confession—" And they seek my life to take it away." Now it is a kind of afterthought.

A little study of this confession in the cave on the side of the Mount of Horeb wherein the Prophet relieves his soul, and justifies his mental attitude to the events of the past, indicates a loneliness of spirit and a kind of hopelessness as to all human effort on his part. It is a repetition of the former confession, but not in the former spirit. It appears as if the Prophet had not received sufficient of the heavenly help in the mission committed to him. There is an insinuation that the state of affairs was so complicated, and so beset with difficulties, that, unless there was an extraordinary amount of special help coming from the God of Israel, there was no hope of success. In a word, that human effort did not count in the struggle, and consequently, human effort was not culpable.

We have, here, the same condition of affairs as in the time of Moses. The great Leader had seen wonderful things in the wanderings of the people through the desert. He had viewed " the cloud by day " and " the pillar of fire by night." He had seen the plagues with which the Lord had chastened the Egyptians and their king. Many more supernatural interferences had been brought to his notice—all showing the wonderful care that the Lord was taking of His wandering children—all indicative of the constant vigilance of the heavenly powers over " the chosen people." Nevertheless, as we have seen in the beginning of the present chapter, Moses complains to the Lord that he can do no more, and that, unless the stronger help is forthcoming, unless there is a clearer manifestation of the care as well as of

the presence of the God of Israel himself, it is vain for the Leader and the people to continue in their march to the Land promised by their God. Hence, we have that extraordinary request of Moses—" If Thou Thyself dost not go before, bring us not out of this place." Elias had been a witness to the punishment inflicted upon Achab and his people. He had seen the fire sent down from Heaven on Mount Carmel. He himself had been fed by the powers of Heaven, not once, but many, many times—all to no purpose, for he seems to have forgotten all that the God of Israel had done for him. It is quite evident that, as in the case of Moses, he had grown disheartened, had lost courage, and was, in his own estimation, dependent solely on the divine aid. His confession is, in fact, the self-same confession that Moses had made. From this we can draw the conclusion that the help to his human weakness should be the same as that proffered to Moses. The restoration of his courage could be expected only from the clemency of the same power that restored the courage of Moses. We, then, naturally expect to hear the following message delivered—" Go forth, and stand upon the Mount before the Lord," and we have no doubt as to what shall follow, for the consolation is at hand.

In the lives of the great friends of the Lord who have lived in the New Dispensation we have something akin to this spiritual condition which we have seen in the lives of both Moses and Elias. It seems that human nature, feeling the uplift given by celestial communications, is, in the early stages of the spiritual life, content with what might be termed, in their case, ordinary interposition, but which is really extraordinary. These are manifestations of the kindness of heaven and of the supernatural care of the God whom they serve. From this stage they proceed to higher flights and demand closer communications, and clearer visions, and not

seldom personal contact. Hence, we read of the Holy Communion having been administered by the Saviour Himself and the Babe of Bethlehem having reposed in the arms of His intimate friends. As human nature labors onwards, and upwards, it becomes aware of the heaviness of its mortality and the great distance between the thing of earth and the Gate of Heaven. Then, because of its exertions in the cause of the God who made it, this privileged human nature asks for help to reach the higher spheres, and, what is really wonderful and inscrutable, the Lord hears the prayers of those poor mortals, whose only claim on the gift they seek is their humanity and their want of efficiency to respond to the divine call. It was so with Moses. It was so with Elias. It was so with Francis of Assisi. It was so with Teresa of Carmel. The origin of all this spiritual presumption, if we dare use such word to characterise that which the Lord seems to love, and to which He gladly responds, is one with that which moved Peter to say on the Mount of Thabor—" Lord, it is good for us to be here: if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." The Evangelist, Mark, makes the kindly observation—" For he knew not what he said: for they were struck with fear." Nowhere do we read that the Son of Man was angry with the beloved Apostle because of this spiritual audacity.

To comfort the defeated warrior of the Lord, to bring some consolation to the afflicted spirit of the Prophet, we are told in simple language—" And behold the Lord passeth."

Moses had asked to see the glory of the Lord—" Shew me Thy glory." And we are informed later on, in the same chapter of Exodus, that the Lord made answer—" I will shew thee all good." The manifestation to Moses must have been of an exceedingly intimate

nature, for, in reference to it, the Lord Himself used the expression—" And when My glory shall pass," whilst at the same time He explains the limitations of the vision granted, which limitations did not arise from any desire of the Lord to give a niggardly response to the Leader's request, but arose solely from the limited receptivity of his humanity—" For man shall not see Me and live." In the case of Elias we have not any expressed request, and so we have not any stipulation as to the extent of the revelation to be made to him. The description of the vision is not at all anything like that given to Moses, but the manner of its presentation is very interesting, and, we must confess, at the same time very mystical, and so has afforded much speculation to the commentators—" And a great and strong wind before the Lord overthrowing the mountains and breaking the rocks in pieces: the Lord is not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake: the Lord is not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire: the Lord is not in the fire. And after the fire a whistling of a gentle air. And when Elias heard it, he covered his face with his mantle, and coming forth he stood in the entering in of the cave. And behold a voice unto him saying: What dost thou here, Elias?"

A host of commentators are in agreement with Saint John Chrysostom, who believes that, in this first manifestation made to Elias, is contained a rebuke to him for his over-zeal and his too thorough-going methods in treating with the enemies of the God of Israel. Although the strong wind had overthrown the mountains and broken up the rocks, nevertheless, the Lord was not present in it—at least in the manner in which He was about to reveal Himself to the Prophet. After the wind came the fire, which was so typical of the nature of the Prophet in all his dealings with men, and also betokened his general attitude to himself. No

fault can be found with the commentators for seeing some personal allusion to the Prophet in this manifestation by fire. The Lord tells the Prophet, by the mouth of His messenger—" the Lord is not in the fire." It could be very easily interpreted as a lesson to the world in general, and to the Prophet in particular, that burning zeal was not everything when one wished to do the work of the Lord. The gentleness of the New Dispensation might not have been out of place in the Old.

Then came the critical moment—" And after the fire a whistling of a gentle air." From the words used by the narrator of these interesting events we must conclude that the Prophet remained inside the cave during the first two manifestations. As soon as the whistling of the gentle air was heard, the man of God arose and went to the entrance of the cave, but before doing so he covered his face with his mantle. It seems quite evident that the mighty display given by nature on the mountain-side forced the Prophet to seek shelter inside the cave. He sought the refuge the more readily that he was warned that the Lord was not in the hurricane nor in the fire—both of which swept the mountain-side, and either of which might have been a danger to him, for he does not seem to have had any guarantee from the Lord that He would protect him; Moses had such guarantee. When the storm had abated, and when the fire had passed, it was time for the Prophet to come forth. We have seen that the Lord had told Moses that " man could not see Him and live "; hence, to protect His servant, whilst showing His glory to him, He assures him that He will hold His hand over his face until the full expression of the Godhead had passed—" I will set thee in a hole of the rock, and protect thee with My right hand." Then, when the time came to gaze on that part of His glory that mortal might look on, the Lord assures His servant—" And I

will take away My hand." Then He informs him—" but My face thou canst not see." Something of the same kind happened to the Prophet Elias, but, instead of the hand of God to shade off the full view of the God of Israel, Elias, probably taught so by the angel, holds his mantle over his face. Standing thus at the entrance of the cave, on the mountain's brow, Elias sees that which is a sufficient payment for all his past labors, and is a guarantee of future help in all emergencies.

What Elias saw on the Mount of God, or what Moses was privileged to gaze upon, no mortal tongue could tell. No human pen could ever describe it. Paul of Tarsus saw something similar, while yet in the flesh, and his only attempted description was—" Eye hath not seen nor ear heard nor hath it entered in the heart of man what things God hath prepared for those who are faithful to Him." John, the favorite Disciple, saw some such sight, and, although he tries to tell his vision in the sweet and expressive poetry of the East, still we are far away from even the faintest conception of that which the shaded eyes of the Prophet of Carmel saw when he stood on the Mountain of God. For us, poor mortals, it is enough to reflect on the lives of these great friends of God in the days that followed that vision on Horeb. We can gain a little concept of the spirit that was infused, and the hope that was enkindled, in the hearts of those grand warriors of the Lord God of Israel.

We may delay for a moment to say that we do not at all entertain seriously the suggestions made by Saint John Chrysostom and those who have followed him in his commentaries on this part of the life of the great Prophet. We have remarked already that we do not think the Prophet erred in any way in his dealings with the enemies of the God of Israel; hence, we do not see any reason why the Lord should teach him a lesson in

regard to his fiery nature, as hitherto displayed; neither do we think that the heavenly authorities had any intention of giving the Prophet an admonition as to the value of measured discretion, according to human standard, in the work to be done for God.

It is quite true that the narrator of the events that heralded the vision granted to Elias tells us of the mighty disturbance in the elements. But it is equally true that, when the Lord was about to announce the Law to "the chosen people" from the Mount of Sinai, "thunders began to be heard and lightning to flash, and a very thick cloud to cover the mount." Indeed, so imposing was the manifestation of the Lord, that we read—"And all the mount was terrible." Also be it noted, in the vision granted to Moses, it is written—"I will protect thee with My right hand till I pass"—from which we may argue that there also were some disturbances which might threaten the life of the great Leader. Again, so far from the zeal of the Prophet being displeasing to the Lord, it seems to us certain that it was this very quality in the life and labors of Elias that most pleased the Lord, just as it is that very quality that has made him an attraction for all ages. When the Saviour of mankind would give the people an idea of the worth of His Precursor, He had recourse to a comparison instructive to His hearers, namely, between the spirit and the power of Elias and John. And the Precursor did not mince his words, neither did Elias—"Ye brood of vipers, who hath taught you to flee from the wrath to come?"—was his salutation to the Sadducees. And the punishment pronounced by him was reminiscent of the spirit that moved so often the Prophet of God—"Every tree therefore that doth not yield good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire." Besides, it is this very spirit of enthusiasm and fire that finds a kindly and a laudatory mention in the

poetical flights of the literary prophets. And the Son of Man, when He found the traffickers in the Temple, was not content with mere words of reproach; He used the whip on the sacrilegious throng. And who can forget the Apocalyptical words "because thou art neither hot nor cold therefore I shall cast thee out."

The final proof, that the manner in which the God of Israel made Himself seen of Elias was not intended as a reproach to the fiery nature of the Prophet, is evident from the fact that Elias, in the days that followed the supposed admonitions, did not hesitate to have recourse to the same methods of treating with the enemies of the God he served. To the soldiers who had come to lay sacrilegious hands on him "Elias answering said: If I be a man of God let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came fire down from heaven, and consumed him and the fifty that were with him." And to the son of Achab, he thunders out, in no less vehement spirit than he did to Achab himself—"therefore from the bed on which thou art gone up, thou shalt not come down, but thou shalt surely die." Need we refer to the fiery soul he breathed into the prophets of Carmel, as can be witnessed in him who received his twofold spirit, Eliseus?

Commentators must seek elsewhere for a proper understanding, if such be ever granted, of the manifestations that preceded the vision of God to Elias. Most decidedly, that of Saint John, and of those who follow in his footsteps, cannot be entertained even for a moment by any one who has made a serious study of the life and times of the Prophet of Carmel.

CHAPTER XXV

AFTER THE VISION

The vision had passed, and his heart was full of gratitude to the God of Israel. A new spirit had been called into being. His soul was full of big resolves for the cause of the people. When he was tired and weary, and was seeking a little repose in the mountain cave to which he had climbed, he heard a voice ask of him—"What dost thou here, Elias?" Although very much changed from the state of mind in which he began his journey, he did not feel sufficiently master of himself to reply, except in those first words which had burst from his lips and which had, indeed, revealed his deep disappointment and his disgust with himself and all that he had hitherto done in the service of the God of Israel. Now, while his whole being was yet throbbing with the glad excitement of the indescribable privilege that had been granted him, once more he hears the same voice that spoke to him in the first hours of his arrival in the cave, and it asks the self-same question—"What dost thou here, Elias?" It seemed like the voice of his own conscience quietly but effectively accusing him, though not distinctly condemning him. He could find no better answer than the one that arose to his lips, ere he had seen the Lord—"With zeal have I been zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant. They have destroyed Thy altars; they have slain Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left: and they seek my life to take it away." After his vision on the mountain-side, the answer seemed poor and miserable—but it was the best

he could think of. The recent miracles worked for him, and in his favor, were sufficient response to his veiled reference to the forgetfulness of the triumph of the evil powers over the God of Israel. Now he knew that the Lord was diligently watching over every movement of the people of Israel, and he knew, too, that the powers of evil could go so far, and only so far, as the Lord was pleased to permit. The idea began to grow upon him that he should have shown himself a better soldier of the Lord God of hosts, if he had met the enemy halfway, if not in their own camp. The value of his life, which was slowly unveiling itself to him since he spoke to the angel, was at last placed in its proper perspective—far more clearly now than when he ate of the blessed bread which the angel had given him. In a word, he could see, now, the powers at work for the Lord, and he also recognised the opposition to them, as well as the value of that opposition.

Hence, Elias was prepared for any mission that the God of Israel would commit to him. And not long had he to await the Will of the Lord as to the next step to be taken. And the Lord said to him—"Go and return on the way through the desert to Damascus. And, when thou art come thither, thou shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And thou shalt anoint Jehu, the son of Namsi, to be king over Israel. And Eliseus the son of Saphat, of Abelmeula, thou shalt anoint to be prophet in thy room." Thus, Elias finds himself once more an active member of the army of the Lord.

This first commission given him must have been an indication to him of the mind of the Lord towards the enemies of the traditions and the faith of the people of Israel. The Prophet could not have doubted why the Lord desired him to interfere in the affairs of the kingdom of Syria, even before He spoke of the "sword of Hazael." The proximity of Syria, and the many

times its rulers had descended on the confines of Israel, were not unknown to the Prophet. The constant fear of every king of Israel, and of Juda, lest the Syrian hosts should conquer their people, was hanging constantly over the head of every successor to the "Wisest of men," Solomon.

Elias was informed that he should go by the way of the desert to the city of Damascus. It is difficult to understand why this way should have been specially mentioned, for it was by far the longest way, and the way beset with innumerable obstacles. Because the Lord had directed the way, there was not any fear of want in regard to either food or drink, if, indeed, there was to be any necessity for the one or the other on the journey. It is just possible that the food already given by the angel was still sustaining the Prophet, who, rejoicing in the late vision, had received a redoubled energy, and, thus, had no fear of undertaking the journey, long and arduous as it must have been, through the desert, to the city of Damascus. The kingdom of Juda, as also the kingdom of Israel, held real dangers for the Prophet, since he was sure to come in contact with the menials of the vengeful Jezabel, who had interest in Juda, even as she had interest in Israel. Perhaps, the Lord, in directing the Prophet through the desert, wished to remind him of his cowardice and of the fear of death that possessed him before the vision.

The distance to be traversed from the Mount of God, Horeb, to the old Syrian capital, no matter how well acquainted with the ways the Prophet might have been, cannot be estimated at less than four hundred miles—no small journey, even if the shortest way had been selected by the Lord. As to the course indicated, undoubtedly, much should depend on the season of the year in which the journey was to be accomplished. His journey through the Wilderness of Sin, and, thence,

to the territories of the Moabites, and then to the land of the Amorites, and finally to Basan, where he should direct his steps to the desert that lay between him and the city to which his mission called him, was assuredly a journey without interest, and without pleasure, save the one, namely, that he was obeying the command of his Master. Since his directions were to keep to the desert, he must have passed away to the east of Rabbath-Moab, Rabbath-Ammon, Geresa, and Esdrai, for these lay, more or less, in the beaten path—at least, for those who required to renew from time to time their supplies of food and drink so necessary for a long journey in those parts. Undoubtedly, Elias had now passed the stage when he desired to reckon with merely human possibilities and human conveniences. From one point of view, it must have been for him a journey of great joy, because he had received the assurance that he was, once more, doing the Will of the Lord. And, all things considered, this was the only thing that counted with men of the type of Elias—especially after the manifestation on the Mountain of Horeb.

The city to which, in compliance with the desire of the Lord, Elias directed his course is one of the most ancient cities of which sacred history speaks. It may not be quite so old as the magnificent capitals that once crowned the banks of the mighty rivers of the Nile and the Euphrates, but it has this advantage—that it has survived longer than any of them, and, to-day, it can still raise its head, if not in all its ancient splendor, at least, it may justly demand favorable notice from the Eastern traveller. From its foundation, it had all the qualities that go to make an abiding city. Its situation is excellent, although much that is artificial has from the beginning been called upon to make it a comfortable resting-place, which men travelling in those parts are apt to look for as a kind of necessity, being located, as

it is, at the fringe of the desert. It has been appropriately called " the eye of the East." Josephus would have the city founded by Us, the grandson of Sem. It appears in the narrative of the life and times of Abram, for it was at a place so named that he defeated the combination of the nomad kings under Chodorlahomor—" And dividing his company, he rushed upon them in the night: and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hoba, which is on the left hand of Damascus." Indeed, it does not seem at all unlikely that Abram was actually king of the region named Damascus; in any case he held sway in the place that seemed to have entitled him to the same influence and authority as the kings of the period possessed in their respective regions. Situated on the great highway between Mesopotamia and Palestine, it was certain to develop into a place of rest for the travellers. Consequently, its bazaars and its markets were the emporiums for all the nations. In the days of Saul, the city was beginning again to come into prominence. And in the reign of David, when Hadad-ezer had been completely defeated, the city rallied to his cause, for which it paid an enormous price, no less than 22,000 Syrians from Damascus being left dead on the field of battle. The hatred of the city for Israel may have been, and probably was, long before the days of David and his son Solomon; but it is of the reign of the latter that we read—" God also raised up against him an adversary, Razon the son of Eliada, who had fled from his master Adarezer, the king of Soba. And he gathered men against him and he became a captain of robbers, when David slew them of Soba. And they went to Damascus, and dwelt there: and they made him king in Damascus. And he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon. And this is the hatred of Adad, and his hatred against Israel: and he reigned in Damascus."

So powerful did this new kingdom become that the two kingdoms of Israel and Juda vied with each other for the possession of its friendship, paying at times very valuable, nay, excessive, bribes in various kinds—"Then Asa took all the silver and gold that remained in the treasures of the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house, and delivered it into the hands of his servants. And sent them to Benadad son of Tabremon the son of Hezion, king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus." This was done to buy his support against Baasa, the king of Israel. Such, briefly, were the relations between the people of God and the Syrians for the years preceding the reign of Achab, when Elias the Prophet was sent to anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, and thus to pour out the vials of the wrath of the kingdom of Syria, and of the city of Damascus in particular, against the men and the women who had betrayed, at the bidding of the queen Jezabel, the traditions and the Law of the God of Israel.

"Thou shalt anoint Hazael to be king over Syria." Having treated thus very briefly of the region which was to be the kingdom of the man whom Elias was to anoint, it becomes our duty to ask who was the person appointed in this manner by the Prophet?

We must take it for granted that the Prophet had as keen and as full an insight into the future as had his successor, Eliseus; hence, when the name of Hazael was mentioned, it was not hidden from the Prophet who this Hazael was, and what his anointing meant to the kingdom of Israel. In fact, it seems somewhat complementary to the mission of the Prophet that he should have some idea of the effect that the commanded change of dynasty in Syria should have on the fortunes of the house of Achab and on the future of the "people of God." That we should get a glimpse of the ideas that possessed the mind of Elias, we must have recourse

to the narrative of the meeting of Eliseus and Hazael in Damascus at the critical time of his anointing.

"Eliseus came to Damascus; and Benadad king of Syria was sick. And they told him, saying: The man of God is come hither. And the king said to Hazael: Take with thee presents, and go to meet the man of God, and consult the Lord by him, saying: Can I recover of this illness? And Hazael went to meet him, taking with him presents, and all the good things of Damascus, the burdens of forty camels. And when he stood before him, he said: Thy son Benadad the king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying: Can I recover of this illness? And Eliseus said to him: Go tell him: Thou shalt recover. But the Lord hath shown me that he shall surely die. And he stood with him, and was troubled so far as to blush: and the man of God wept. And Hazael said to him: Why does my lord weep? And he said: Because I know the evil that thou wilt do to the children of Israel. Their strong cities thou wilt burn with fire, and their young men thou wilt kill with the sword: and thou wilt dash their children, and rip up their pregnant women." We have in this prophecy of the successor of Elias the meaning of the words—"And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall escape the sword of Hazael"—thereby intimating that great slaughter would be accomplished by the king whom Elias was now bidden to go and anoint. If the prophetic soul of Eliseus was so troubled at the things he knew Hazael would do, what must have been the agony of soul of the man of God, Elias, who loved so ardently the erring people of the Lord? Hazael was the especial instrument against the people, just as Jehu was to be against the house of Achab. The events of the reign of Hazael justify and make true every prophetic word of Eliseus. In the Sacred Narrative we read—"In those days the Lord began to be weary of Israel; and Hazael

ravaged them in all the coasts of Israel"; and again—"And the wrath of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of Hazael, king of Syria"; and again—"And Joachaz had no more left of the people than fifty horsemen and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen: for the king of Syria had slain them, and brought them low as the dust by thrashing in the barn-floor." Finally, we may see that the punishment on Israel was not a mere passing one—"Now Hazael, king of Syria, afflicted Israel all the days of Joachaz." In a word, those sights whose vision had brought tears to the eyes of the successor of Elias brought rivers of blood to the unhappy land that listened not to the prophets of the Lord.

"Whosoever shall escape the sword of Hazael, shall be slain by Jehu." The Prophet had received a commission "to anoint Jehu the son of Namsi to be king over Israel." Achab was the king of Israel, and he was to be succeeded by his son, Ochozias, whose days were very brief. Then came to the throne Joram, his second son, who was to be the victim at the hands of Jehu, as we have already seen in some of the preceding pages. Had Elias been vindictive in any way—a quality that we seldom associate with fiery natures like that of Elias—the order "to anoint Jehu" should have brought him great satisfaction, for he was truly going to prepare the way for a scourge that would not spare the family of his enemy the queen, Jezabel, nor the family of her children's children. Not content with chastising the family of Achab in Israel, Jehu extended his avenging hand over the kingdom of Juda. Wherever there was a branch of the tree of Achab, the ferocious avenger tore it down and consigned it to a terrible passing—"And Achab had seventy sons in Samaria. So Jehu wrote letters, and sent to Samaria to the chief men of the city

and to the ancients," who were to " take the heads of the sons of the king and to come to him at Jezrahel." They came with their gruesome burdens, but because they were of the party of Achab they, too, met their deaths—" So Jehu slew all that were left of the house of Achab." Not content with the vengeance on the house of Achab, he turned his attention to the friends of Ochozias, whom he had already slain even as he had slain the son of Achab, Joram. " He met with the brethren of Ochozias king of Juda," and he said—" Take them alive. And they took them alive, and killed them at the pit by the cabin, two and forty men : and he left not any of them." Then he made his way to Samaria, as the graphic narrative continues—" And he slew all that were left of Achab in Samaria, to a man." Then came the terrible chastisement on the devotees of the god that had caused such heart-burnings to Elias. Jehu proclaimed a feast, and pretended that he was going to offer sacrifice, just as Achab had offered it in the temple of Baal. When the priests and the people were assembled in the temple, Jehu commanded his soldiers and captains to " Go in and kill them. Let none escape. And the soldiers and the captains slew them with the edge of the sword, and cast them out. And they went into the city of the temple of Baal. And brought the statue out of the temple and burnt it." And this is the end of the reign of the god who troubled Israel in the days of Jezabel. " So Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel."

We have already said we have no reason to suppose that the man of God was not aware of the things that were to be brought to pass by the execution of the commands of the Lord when He ordered him to anoint those two kings. It was a forceful reminder to the Prophet that the God of Israel could gain His ends even though human weakness refused to co-operate.

He had labored long and arduously for the extirpation of the worship of Baal from the lives of the children of Israel, and he had failed; but his failure did not prevent another from accomplishing the desired end, in so far as it was possible. He had failed in his mission to Achab, and he had fled before the hate of the queen. Another should come, in due time, whose mission was not to be a failure, and the race of Achab was to be as if it had never been. The mills of God were grinding slowly, but, nevertheless, surely; hence, the dejection of the Prophet had no reasonable foundation. No wonder that on his journey to Damascus he had taken a resolve to go back to his desert-life and its solitude. The rest of his life would be spent in humble prayer for the soldiers whom the God of Israel had given commissions to prepare the children of Israel and Juda for the coming of Him whose Virgin Mother he had been privileged to gaze on, when his mortal eyes looked to the little cloud that rose silently, but none the less significantly, from the tranquil waters of the blue Mediterranean.

The question about the manner in which the Prophet fulfilled his commission (that is to say, what was intended by the command "to anoint" the two kings, in which anointing also seemed to participate the prophet Eliseus, as if it were part of the ceremony of entry into the prophetical body to which Elias belonged, for we readily admit there were different grades of prophets), has occupied the commentators from the earliest times. The difficulties that present themselves in the present case are several. Firstly, we have the Prophet "anointing" the king, who was not of the children of Israel. Then, we know that Jehu was "anointed" years afterwards by Eliseus. Lastly, there is a doubt as to whether Elias nominated, or rather chose, his successor by the "anointing" ceremony, or by placing the cloak over the shoulders of Eliseus, as

is described in the ending verses of the chapter wherein the vision is related. In so far as the Sacred Text is an evidence, we have the few words—" He cast his mantle upon him "—and we cannot find any mention of " anointing " either at this, or any other, time in the life of Eliseus.

In the function of appointing a king for the people of Israel, it is specially mentioned in one of the Psalms that the oil used in the ceremony is holy oil—" I have found David my servant: with my holy oil I have anointed him." In the anointing of a king who was not of the people of God, we do not think that there would be any question of using in the ceremony holy oil. In the meagre ceremony used to elevate to the throne of Israel their first king, Saul, it is mentioned that " Samuel took a little vial of oil; and poured it upon his head: and kissed him; and said: Behold the Lord hath anointed thee to be prince over His inheritance." And continuing he said—" And this shall be a sign unto thee that God hath anointed thee to be prince." The essential part of the ceremony seems to have been the anointing. And we may observe, too, that the anointing is attributed to the Lord, Samuel being, to all appearances, only an instrument. The question that arises is—Why does the narrator of the incident specially mention a " vial " of oil, as if the prophet had this vessel already for use; and are we to suppose that the oil was preserved for the " anointing " of the prophets, who, like Samuel, represented almost kingly power? As in the case of Saul, so also was David anointed by a messenger of Yahveh. The Lord said to Samuel—" Arise and anoint him, for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren. And the spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward." The value of this first anointing on the part of the prophet Samuel does not

appear so evident when we read that " all the tribes of Israel came to David in Hebron saying : Behold we are thy bone and thy flesh " ; and then—" The ancients also of Israel came to the king to Hebron, and King David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord. And they anointed David to be king over Israel." The first anointing was, undoubtedly, of a private nature, but it was, nevertheless, done in the presence of the brethren of David. It is just possible that, as time went on, there were two anointings, one of which should be public, when all the difficulties were removed for the entering into the authority of the kingdom.

The use of oil in religious ritual goes back to the days when Babylon was in the ascendant amongst the nations of the earth. In the religious texts many references can be found to the use of oil. It has been remarked that the private anointing with oil seemed always to precede the selection of a king in place of one still reigning, and whom either the God of Israel, or at least His prophets, were determined to depose. We have seen this ceremony, or whatever it represented, observed in the case of the two kings of whom we have treated at large in the present chapter. Although this event in the history of Eliseus is quoted as sufficient evidence that the prophets were anointed, the matter is not at all decided, and writers still discuss the pros and cons.

Weighing all the circumstances in the anointing of the two kings by Elias, we come to the conclusion that the ceremony was not a religious one, strictly so called. It was rather a designation for a certain office, and, just as in contracts of all kinds there is some outward sign of the interior acts of the will, so in the case of those designated by the messengers of God the outward sign of the mission was the anointing with oil. In this way we can easily imagine how the man of God could anoint the king of Syria, even though he was not of the king-

dom of the children of Israel. That Hazael should have complete belief in the prophetic act is easily understood, because the city of Damascus was nigh to the confines of the kingdom of Israel, and the associations were very ancient between the two peoples. That the prophets were esteemed and respected in Syria was a well-known fact, and very often the opinion of these holy men was sought before any great enterprise was undertaken. It would be useless to enumerate the many examples that both profane and sacred history has recorded.

We have already spoken of the connection between Damascus and " the chosen people " from the time of Abraham. It is easy to recall the visit of Naaman, called " the leper," the famous Syrian General, to the successor of Elias. There was, then, nothing to be wondered at in the anointing of Hazael, just whatever the ceremony was wont to mean. Another question seems to arise from the commission given to Elias to anoint Jehu—Was the anointing that is mentioned in the ninth chapter of the Fourth Book of Kings the ceremony referred to in the command given to Elias, or was it a supplementary one? The words of the narrative are very simple, and seem to imply that it is for the first time that the ceremony is going to be performed on Jehu—" And Eliseus the prophet called one of the sons of the prophets and said to him : Gird up thy loins, and take this little bottle of oil in thy hand and go to Galaad. And when thou art come hither, thou shalt see Jehu the son of Josaphat the son of Namsi. And going in thou shalt make him rise up from amongst his brethren, and carry him into an inner chamber. Then taking the little bottle of oil, thou shalt pour it on his head, and shalt say : Thus saith the Lord : I have anointed thee king over Israel. And thou shalt open the door and flee and thou shalt not remain there." It is not impossible that this was the second

and confirmatory anointing. The first was already performed by Elias.

One thing is sure—that whether the ceremony were to be the only one used in calling to the kingly power, or whether it were a mere designation on the part of the prophets, who seem to be the agents acting for the Lord, the ceremony, or whatever it was, gave to the recipient the enormous power to rebel against the established form of government and to scheme and strive by all possible means to overthrow the existing government. Not unlikely, there may have been a kind of virtual deposition of the reigning king, for what else can mean the words used after the ceremony said to have been performed over David? "And the spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SUCCESSOR OF THE PROPHET, ELISEUS

The order in which the Prophet executed the commands of the Lord in regard to " the anointing " of Hazael, and Jehu, and Eliseus, is not at all clear from the sacred narrative—as we have it in the subsequent pages. We may, however, with a good deal of reason, assume that he fulfilled the mission of the God of Israel in the briefest possible period, and in the order desired by Him. The journey to Damascus, no matter how silent the Scriptures are as to the doings of the Prophet in that great Syrian capital, was at once accomplished by Elias, and, there, he must have executed that part of the work assigned to him, namely, the anointing of Hazael. After this event, he must have retraced his steps along the eastern side of the Jordan and, then, passing over one of the fords of the river, made his way past Bethsan towards Abelmeula, the region in which resided the family of the man who was to succeed him in the prophetic hierarchy. The direct course to the village, or town, so named is to keep to the right side of the river, and then travelling along the great highway to the lower course of the river for about ten miles below Bethsan, Abelmeula is reached—the native place of Eliseus. This route, however, was not without its dangers to the Prophet; hence, it is more probable that he took the longer and more difficult way, because less exposed to the surveillance of the officials of the queen of Israel, Jezabel. Whichever way he chose, the journey was, at least, one of six or eight days.

It would be idle to contend that Elias had any difficulty in finding Eliseus, the son of Saphat, of

Abelmeula, even though he had never seen him before. The Lord giving him a command did not fail to supply him with every means to fulfil the command; hence, divinely enlightened, there could not be in the search for his successor any difficulty. There is, however, another aspect of the question. It is not at all impossible that Eliseus had already been well known to the Prophet. So many young men, like the son of Saphat, had given their lives to the " praising " of the Lord of Israel, and yet had not permanently left their homes to reside in the convents of the prophets. Moreover, we cannot forget that many of the residences of the prophets, for the time being, had been deserted because of the persecution waged against the prophets of the true God by Jezabel and her friends. No doubt, many of the young men who had dedicated their lives to God had been forced to leave their colleges or convents and betake themselves to the homes of their fathers, at least, until the days should come when they could betake themselves to their holy calling once more. The character of Eliseus was exactly one that should have appealed to Elias, had he known him as one of " the sons of the prophets " before the Lord had given him the command " to anoint him." In so far as we know, no other of the prophetic School, even if we scan the many years to follow, could have so well carried on the prophetic mission with the zeal and the courage of Elias. Then, again, we have the immediate display of affection and reverence shown to the older man on the part of the younger. Doubtless, the name of the man of God was a household name in Israel and amongst the peoples in the regions around, but that would hardly account for the immediate demonstration of emotion and obedience on the part of Eliseus. The scene, as depicted by the sacred narrator, conveys the idea that the successor of the Prophet knew to what office he had

been called, and also the difficulties as well as the honors attached to it. Without a doubt, the suggestion thrown out by many of the commentators on this event in the life of both prophets is a very reasonable one, namely, that the two had met before this " anointing," and that each knew the character of the other. The scene could, indeed, be accounted for by attributing it all to the inspiration of the God who had sent the Prophet on the mission; but as the former explanation seems quite within the bounds of ordinary contingencies there is, really, no reason to call in the extraordinary interference of the Master in all the work of the Prophet, especially where the Lord can well and conveniently dispose the common occurrences of life to the accomplishing of His Will.

We must confess ourselves amongst those who are of the opinion that Eliseus, the son of Saphat, had already been initiated into the School of the prophets; but we may add that he had not, hitherto, held any position of trust or of jurisdiction. Until after the vision on the Mount of God, Horeb, we are of opinion that Elias had no idea of founding a new School of the prophets—that is to say, he did not see the inefficiency of the prophetic instrument, as it was then, to accomplish the designs that were dear to his enthusiastic nature—until his colloquy with the shadow of the God of Israel, to Whom he had spoken. At that time, a new spirit was infused into his being, and he lived only for the banishing of the strange gods from the hearts of the children of Israel, and for the re-establishing of the power and the worship of the true God amongst His " chosen people." Just as necessary was a new instrument to accomplish the prophetic mission, as a new power was necessary to abolish the house of Achab, and another to chastise the unfaithful and unrepentant children of Israel. Hazael was a necessary instrument in the work

to be done for the Lord; and so was Jehu; and, in a sense, no less necessary was the new spirit about to be infused into the prophetic School. This is, indeed, the correct meaning to be given to the reason rendered by the Lord as to " the anointing " of the three who were to recall Israel to its service in the cause of the God of Israel—" And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall escape the sword of Hazael, shall be slain by Jehu; and whosoever shall escape the sword of Jehu, shall be slain by Eliseus." Although the interpretation given to explain " the sword " of the prophet is sufficiently satisfactory, namely, that " the sword " of the Word of God is intended, and not a physical sword, we may here note that there is no mention of " the sword " of the prophet Eliseus, for we find only the words—" shall be slain by Eliseus."

The words which immediately follow in the Sacred Text seem to throw light on the real meaning of the words above cited—" And I will leave me seven thousand men in Israel whose knees have not been bowed before Baal, and every mouth that hath not worshipped him kissing the hands." As in many other places in the Scriptures, the number " seven " is a very indeterminate number- even when it is followed by the larger numeral, " thousand "; hence, we may accept the number as large, indeed—but without any special notation having been intended. That there were faithful and tried souls in the kingdom of Achab could not be doubted, after this assertion on the part of the Lord; and that not a few of these were to be called by the prophet Eliseus into the new institution for which he was to be ordained the chief is clearly implied, for they have all the qualities that contribute to form the warriors of the Lord, since they have remained faithful to the traditions of Israel in the terrible times that had been experienced even in the days of the Prophet.

Many of the prophets who had already dedicated their lives to the " praising " of the God of Israel were prepared to enter on the narrower path, the path that was more difficult to travel upon, but it was the only path that led to the perfection of their calling as prophets. The solitude into which they had entered to escape the notice of the officers of the fierce queen Jezabel, the mortification that they had perforce to undergo, the prayer by which they strengthened themselves against the evil day—all were a preparation for the call to the more perfect life immediately to be proposed to them by the most venerated of them all, Elias. From amongst those who thus far had never entered the prophetic throng, like the governor of the house of Achab, Abdias, there was a rich harvest to reap and to gather into the convents and the colleges of the men whose successors were destined for centuries to keep alive the faith in the hearts of the children of Israel, and who, from time to time, should descend from their mountain homes or issue forth from their desert resorts, to declare the Law in the very face of the rulers of the people, as well as to reproach the people for any backsliding or treachery to the God of Israel—when the Lord should so order them.

The most important event, in the eyes of the narrator of the history of the people of God, as given in the Book of Kings, was evidently " the anointing," if such it may be called, of Eliseus, for he immediately makes a seemingly uncalled-for digression to relate the scene in which this " anointing " of Eliseus takes place. The anointing of Hazael and Jehu, although of so great importance to the nations to which they belonged, is relegated to another place, if, indeed, it be the same anointing that is spoken of subsequently in the Sacred Pages. About this latter, there is a long and varied discussion.

" And Elias departing from thence, found Eliseus the son of Saphat ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen. And he was one of them that were ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen." If the son of Saphat had been away from his father's home, and living in the homes of " the sons of the prophets," he had then returned; and the Prophet must have been certain that he was in Abelmeula, for he goes directly to the house of Saphat.

Eliseus seems to have been the industrious son of thrifty and well-to-do parents. Even though Eliseus may have been a " son of the prophets " or a Priest, the occupation at which the man of God found him was not beneath his dignity. The science and the art of husbandry, as then known and practised, were held in high esteem, not only for the profits accruing to those who held arable land, but from the circumstance that agriculture was supported and protected by the fundamental laws of the State. While actually engaged at their callings, sacred as they were, the Priest and the Levite were excused from their part in the tilling of the soil, but they could at other times take part in this ancient and much esteemed occupation. When Saul had been already anointed king over the people of God, the news of the infamous conduct of the Ammonites was brought to him " as he was following oxen out of the field " in which he had been engaged ploughing. And Ozias, the son of Amasias, king of Juda, is praised by the Holy Writ because he was a lover of agricultural pursuits—" He had also vineyards and dressers of vines in the mountains, and in Carmel : for he was a man that loved husbandry."

Moses, after the departure of the people from the land of Egypt, kept well before the minds of the Hebrews the necessity of following agricultural pursuits, and we find this idea embodied in the legislation given by him to the people. He would apportion to each man a

certain quantity of land, and gave him the right of tilling it and of transmitting it to his heirs. Persons thus possessing land could not alienate it for any longer period than the year of the coming jubilee. It was, likewise, ordained that when land had been sold or pledged, the vendor, or the person pledging the land, or, failing him, the nearest relative, could redeem the land by paying the amount of profits up to the year of the jubilee. A mere glance at the general state of the people of Israel will show how dependent they were on the fruits of the labor of their own land. Hence its value to the State and the individual.

It was, then, the natural occupation at which the man of God should expect to find his future successor, no matter what had been his previous calling. The fact that so many yoke of oxen are mentioned is, no doubt, indicative of the affluence of the family of Eliseus. We are not told how long it was after the drought that Elias visited the home of his successor. If the time were not so long after the cessation of the water-famine, we should expect to find the ground yet hard and difficult to break; hence, there should be many oxen for what otherwise should be simple work. Whatever be the cause of the difficulty in this particular case to break through the earth—and we must conclude that there was a real difficulty—it is evident that there were twelve yoke of oxen attached to the one plough—which, in itself, is sufficient sign of work to be done. It has been suggested that the twelve yoke of oxen were not all attached to the same plough, but that there were twelve ploughs, each with its single yoke of oxen. This, however, was scarcely likely to be the case, because it is definitely stated that Eliseus "was one of them that were ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen," thereby intimating that he was not the only ploughman, and, moreover, that the others who were assisting in the

preparing of the earth had also, each of them, twelve yoke of oxen.

Abelmeula, being situated in the valley of the Jordan, was probably by nature a rather fertile and fruitful part of the country, although it had suffered from the drought of three years' standing. At least forty days had passed, and more, since the drought had ended, and in the meantime the earth had received either " the early or the later rains "; hence, the probability is that the son of Saphat was preparing new ground, and consequently ground difficult to plough for the coming sowing. If the crop intended were wheat, then the month in which the work was being done was in November or December. If the intention of the son of Saphat were to sow barley, the ploughing should necessarily be a month or two later.

The beasts of burden that endured the hardships of the agricultural work were bulls and cows, and also he-asses and she-asses. It was, however, forbidden to yoke them together, that is to say, the bull or cow with the ass, for the obvious reason that the inequality of make and stature, not to speak of their habits, were so diverse that unnecessary toil should have been the lot of either the one or the other—" Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together." Consequently, we find that Eliseus was obedient to the law in using the twelve animals that were of the one species. They are termed " oxen " because they were in all probability bulls. In the warmer climates the male kind is very useful and easily adapted to the toils of agriculture, provided that " the oxen " be not pampered. They are quite governable, and not at all as we find them in the colder climates, where they are ever a danger to those who have to deal with them. Even if the animals did become somewhat troublesome, the method in which they had their noses perforated, and then " ringed,"

placed them quite at the mercy of the driver; by a dexterous little movement, he could impede their respiration to such a degree that their efforts to hurt were almost vain. To those who are acquainted only with the "oxen" of our northern climate, a field wherein were so many yokes of oxen should seem a veritable battle-ground, where danger lurked on every side. Not so was it with the field in which the son of Saphat and his co-workers were employed, for all the oxen were not only tame and obedient to the rein, but had many qualities that endeared them to their drivers.

The plough then in use was of a rather primitive form, and very unlike the agricultural instrument of the present time. Twelve oxen drawing the plough of to-day should be rather a formidable machine to do the work of a farm. We must remember that the plough in the days when Elias "called" Eliseus was made completely of wood; and probably was manufactured from some tree bent by nature into a form so pointed that it could enter, and thus make an impression on, the ground. And, if the unfortunate farmer could not find the suitable tree, he could only produce a plough which in form and in strength was a kind of apology for a plough. No doubt, during the years of Elias the smiths, who were generally of the race of Syrians or some of the outlying tribes, might have helped in the manufacture of the plough made partly in iron; but then instruments of war were of greater service and were more highly appreciated. The ploughs strengthened with iron clasps were to be found only in the fields of those who were blessed in a double way with the things of the world, namely, influence and riches. It is not at all very improbable that the family of Saphat may have been able to supply their laborers with the plough of the latter kind—nevertheless, the craftsmen in iron were not plentiful in Israel. No matter what may have been the

quality of the plough, the work was not at all easy, because the plough, having no wheels nor any of its present conveniences, required much guiding, and the force necessary to make the impression in the ground had to be measured by the hand of the driver, and at the same time the force had to be applied adroitly, for the plough was not capable of too great stress. We may remark that smiths, and generally all workers in iron, had been prohibited in the land of the Israelites for many long years by those who dominated the people.

The ceremony of initiation into the prophetic band evidently took place in public, and in the very field where the son of Saphat had been ploughing. The ceremony over, it would appear that Elias then departed from the future "Father" of the prophetic School, satisfied that he had done his part of the work commanded by the Lord. It is very probable that Eliseus, already aware of all that the prophetic life entailed, knew that the ceremony was a mere declaration of his fitness to occupy some future position of trust, and so did not merit the same profound cogitation, nor such definite sign of acceptance, as if the mode of life were something entirely new to him. Elias, on his part, had done all that was demanded of him, and as Eliseus knew already the principles and the practices of the prophetic life, there was no necessity that he should delay and instruct his successor. We must not expect a too profuse description of the ceremony, nor of the parting of the two prophets; at the same time, there is some reason why it is written—"And he forthwith left the oxen and ran after Elias." When the man of God had thrown his mantle over the prophetic ploughman, he had not evidently asked him to desist from his occupation. With the new commission given to him, Eliseus had certainly another and a new conception of what this position of trust meant to him; and, above all, that for

the future he was no more a member of the family of Saphat. As a mere prophet, at least up till that time, the "calling" did not necessarily demand such a sacrifice as the total and complete severing of all family ties and the parting from all domestic life as hitherto lived; now, however, it dawns on the "newly-anointed" that he was to make a bigger sacrifice to be worthy of the office to which he was then "called." Hence, he suddenly leaves the oxen in the field and follows the departing Prophet to ask a favor which the newer circumstances demand—at least, the kindly heart and the obedient spirit of Eliseus believes that his Master cannot refuse his request, owing to the altered circumstances, and he is not far out, for the man of God listened to his supplication and replies, even though with his usual terseness—"Go, and return: for that which was my part, I have done to thee." We could not imagine such request to issue from the lips of the Prophet of Fire, for he, like the mountain eagle, soared aloft, and could never stoop so low to human weakness; with the prophetic spirit, he had dwelt so long on the higher plains that he had forgotten all human ties. It is, however, a real relief when we find that the man of God did not blame in another this little condescension to the frailty of our poor nature in its relation to other poor mortals.

The request of the son of Saphat was a very natural one, because his parents were yet living—"Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother and then I will follow thee." The very request shows a true perception of the new duties incumbent on the future "sons of the prophets." Elias, conscious of the strain attendant on the new regimen, bends to the human element in the new chief of the prophets. Stern himself and, in so far as we can judge, with very little of the elements of the ordinary mortal, he shows a peculiar

leniency towards the son of Saphat. It is as if he saw the future trials in store for the mild and rather gentle soul whom the Lord had chosen for the work that lay before the prophetic School—" And he said to him: Go and return back." Elias had no fear that the parents of his successor could influence the vocation of their son. He was thoroughly satisfied that when the Lord had bidden him execute a commission that the result desired was assured; hence, no matter what difficulties would be placed in the way of the newly-ordained, there was no turning back from the mission allotted to him.

Not only was the son of Saphat allowed to bid farewell to his parents, but, in the true Eastern custom, he was permitted to celebrate the event of his " calling " in the manner most expressive of the joy that accompanied this favor bestowed, not only on the son of the family, but on the family itself. The scene described in the last verse of the nineteenth chapter of the Third Book of Kings is an expression of joy and good-feeling, not unmixed with a desire to congratulate the happy son and the no less fortunate family. The friends from far and near are invited, and are all to be partakers in the common felicity—" And returning back from him " (that is to say, the Prophet), " he took a yoke of oxen and killed them, and boiled the flesh with the plough of the oxen, and gave to the people and they ate. And rising up he went away, and followed Elias, and ministered to him." We do not mistake the meaning of the newly-called prophet burning his plough, which afforded firewood for the preparation of the feast. Neither the oxen nor the plough were to be of any use to the " son of Saphat " in the years to come—years that were to be spent in the ministry of the God of Israel and in the company of the " sons of the prophets," whose " Father " he was to be.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE OLD ORDER PASSETH

Biblical scholars have found in the origin, and the progress, and the mission of the prophetic Order amongst the people of God a theme of never-failing interest. The material upon which men may found a just, though incomplete, judgment is not wanting; all the deductions from the premises—not, perhaps, so definite as they should be, but neither so very indefinite—are always according to the trend of mind peculiar to the school in which the student has been educated. The information given us by the rationalist is logical enough—if there was no God in Israel. Were all scholars to accept the principles of inspiration and interpretation, as recognised and sanctioned by the Church, our information might not be so very complete, but it should be very satisfactory. However, there is a God of Israel, and even amongst Christians not all accept the rules of interpretation laid down by the Church; hence, we find ourselves in a world of difficulties and mere suggestions, of illicit conclusions and questionable deductions, the moment we leave the old and well-beaten path of Tradition.

It would be entirely out of place to discuss the value of the three names that have been used by the Hebrew writers to signify what is generally understood by "prophet." We may also pass over the two, or perhaps three, words that have been employed by the Greeks to express the persons whom we are wont to call "prophets." Briefly, we may say that there are three meanings attached to the word "prophet." Firstly, we

find the word conveying to us the meaning of " seer," which might be better interpreted as clairvoyant. Secondly, we find the same word used to signify " one who announces any piece of information." Then, thirdly, we find that the word " prophet " indicates an agent who has been chosen by the Lord to announce His Will in some, or many, particular cases. We can immediately see the vast difference it will make to a writer who accepts any one of these meanings to the exclusion of the others, although, strictly speaking, there is no inherent reason why we should object to any one of them—if it be accepted in the proper sense and applied to the proper class of person.

We reject at once the supposition that the prophets, as spoken of in the Sacred Scriptures, preceded monotheism, and were the introducers or precursors of it amongst the children of men. There is not even the shadow of doubt that monotheism and theocracy were the predecessors of the prophets, and that, owing to the frailty of men, and, above all, owing to the surroundings of " the chosen people,," men who were imbued with the spirit of those who are called " prophets " became a kind of necessity. They were, then, at times, what might be termed a kind of accompaniment of the religion gifted to the people of God. In this, there is nothing to be marvelled at, for in the progress of the Christian Religion we find the same kind of heralds and teachers. Very true, there is not so marked a mission in the New Dispensation; nevertheless, in the " prophets " of these times there are to be found occasionally manifestations as wonderful as those of the Old Dispensation. The times have changed, and, consequently, the necessity for divine interference has changed also. It is very easy to conclude that the period of mere preparation for the advent of the Messias must have a different kind of

manifestation from the time when the Messias is with His people. What we have termed " the prophets " of the Christian ages—they, too, have prevailed over the elements of nature, have called forth the dead, have foretold victories and defeats; they have given the law to kings and princes; they have dragged men from the haunts of vice in the big cities into the deserts and solitudes; they have told the story of Love Divine until men cried out—" The Lord He is God." One element alone is absent, in these ages, because " the Lamb has come Who would not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax," and that is the element of severity, of merciless justice. In the New Dispensation we have an Elias, indeed, but he is without his sword; his voice is no longer raised to tell the people to put to the death the enemies of the true God. Nay, rather, the prevailing idea is—that " they be converted and live." The times have created a change in the men whom we may justly call in both Dispensations " the prophets of the Lord." Ages before the Leader of the Hebrew hosts led his people from the land of bondage to the " Promised Land," there were in the various religions of the children of men so-called " prophets." Between these and the men selected by the Lord to conserve in the heart of His chosen people the true faith, there is a world of difference. Those critics who would make Elias, and Eliseus, and " the School of prophets " who followed in their wake, successors of the Arabian dervishes and soothsayers are either incapable of making comparisons, or do not wish to make them. Beyond the broad fact that each class has some connection with a religion, or what may be termed, for convenience sake, a religion, there is nothing else in common.

The first to whom the title prophet has been given in the Sacred Scriptures is Abraham. To Abimelech the Lord said—" Now restore the man his wife; for

he is a prophet." Undoubtedly, the Lord had spoken to Abraham and, moreover, gave to him certain recognised signs of His friendship, especially when he had shown his obedience to Him in regard to the sacrifice of his son, Isaac; hence, in a broad sense, we might class the Patriarch amongst the prophets. Moses, although he offered sacrifice, was not a Priest, as his brother Aaron was; but he was the first of the Hebrew prophets who performed the duties and had the endowments, as well as the inspiration, that we shall always connect with the true prophetical office. He received orders and commands from the Lord, and these he faithfully committed to the people. He reproached the people with their backsliding and denounced the penalty on their lack of faith and on their treachery. Whilst yet the great Leader was conducting his flock to the desired land, we find that his sister, Mary, is numbered amongst those who are endowed with the prophetical attributes—"So Mary the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in hand: and all the women went forth after her with timbrels and with dances. And she began the song to them." Here, we have a manifestation of the prophetic spirit that has created some confusion in the minds of those who would give a merely natural explanation to the office of the whole body of the prophets from the earliest times. As is evident, the exterior manifestations of the prophetic spirit could be feigned, or might be the result of another power other than that of God, Who, for His own purposes, might allow such manifestations. It is precisely this element in the work of the prophet that has misled so many critics, and is truly the stumbling block for the rationalistic writers when treating of the origin and progress and the mission of the true prophets of the people of God.

Even in those early years we find that there were

other prophets than those of Israel; but, when capable writers began to question the credentials of these once-called " prophets," they are put into a class by themselves. Balaam saw the future glory of Israel, and because the Lord desired him to speak of it to Balac, who had brought him to curse Israel, we have in the Book of Numbers the prophecy that has been called after its quasi-author—" And when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord that he should bless Israel, he went not as he had done before, to seek divination: but setting his face towards the desert, and lifting up his eyes, he saw Israel abiding in their tents by their tribes: and the spirit of the Lord rushing upon him." Then follows the beautiful vision of the greatness of the people whom Balac would have had him curse. Balaam was, except in this matter of Balac, nothing but a celebrated diviner or soothsayer. The fact that the Lord had used him on this occasion is no reason why he should have the title of " prophet." The Fathers of the Church deny it to him, and they easily explain why Saint Peter has used the title in speaking of him. This event in the life of Balaam is of use to us in the discussion as to the nature of a true prophet, for at least it narrows the qualifications, since not all who tell true things, nor all who are used by the Lord for a certain definite purpose, become, thereby, prophets in the true sense of the word.

When Israel was under the government of the Judges we find that the Lord makes use of a woman to instruct His people, and, in her mission, she gives evidence of all the qualifications that are demanded from one who has a right to the name prophet. In fact, at every stage in the history of Israel, when there seems a necessity for special guidance, the Lord does not hesitate to call forth someone gifted with all the requirements to lead the people aright, whether the agent chosen be male or

female. It is thus the Book of Judges speaks of the most famous of the female prophetesses—" And there was at that time Deborah a prophetess the wife of Lapidoth, who judged the people. And she sat under a palm tree, which was called by her name, between Rama and Bethel, in Mount Ephraim; and the children of Israel came up to her for all judgment." The inference is written large in the Sacred Pages that in the office peculiar to the prophetic circle the question of sex did not enter. It was truly a case of the Spirit breatheth whereso it wills.

We are reminded constantly of the presence of these prophets, or men of God, in the life of " the chosen people " after their arrival in the Land of Promise. When Heli had charge of the Holy Place, we read—" And there came a man of God to Heli and said to him: Thus saith the Lord." We see, here, the distinction made between the Priesthood and the prophetic circle. For it is quite evident that the two officers were totally different; but it must be admitted that they were not mutually exclusive the one from the other—that is to say, there could be a combination in one and the same person, as we shall see presently.

Anna, the wife of Elcana, made a vow to the Lord—" And she made a vow saying: O Lord of hosts, if Thou wilt look down on the affliction of Thy servant, and wilt be mindful of me, and not forget Thy handmaid, and wilt give to Thy servant a man child: I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head." The result of this vow or promise made to the Lord is thus related—" Anna conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel: because she had asked him from the Lord." In accord with the promise thus made, we read again—" Samuel ministered before the face of the Lord: being a child girded with a linen ephod." It was in Silo,

where rested the Ark of the Lord, that Samuel, under the High Priest Heli, administered in the early years of his service in the Temple.

From his earliest years in the temple, at Silo, Samuel gave evidence of the prophetic gifts, notwithstanding that he was destined for the Priesthood. Samuel "slept in the temple of the Lord, where the Ark of God was. And the Lord called Samuel. And he answered: Here I am." Then was revealed to Samuel all the things that the Lord had sworn to do to the family of Heli because of their iniquity in the service of the temple. Samuel, although yet young, had seen the evil conduct of the sons of Heli, and had observed the feebleness of the aged Priest in the cause of the Holy Place, and his soul burned with indignation. Ere Samuel had reached the sacred "anointing" of the Priesthood he had been chosen as a prophet of the Lord to recall the people to the faith that they had almost forgotten. In after years we see that Samuel was more of a prophet than a Priest, nevertheless, in him we have the union of the two callings beloved of the Lord, the Priest and the prophet. This union has been a source of misinterpretation to many who have not approached the study with the safe guiding that the Church affords to her children who are engaged in the study of the things related in the Sacred Volumes.

Samuel, although a Priest of Yahveh, could no longer doubt of the anger of the God of Israel, because, not only had the sanctuary at Silo been the scene of terrible crimes on the part of the Priests who were administering there, but the people were chastised in a manner that spoke of deep indignation on the part of the Lord. And the most evident sign of divine anger was in the destruction of the Holy Place and the carrying away of the Ark of the Covenant with all the sacred tokens that had accompanied it for years.

" And it came to pass that the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight : and Israel went out to war against the Philistines," with the result that " Israel was overthrown; and every man fled to his dwelling. And there was an exceeding great slaughter."

The destruction of the temple at Silo was evidently one of the first results of the victory. A fort was built by the Philistines to command the pass at Michmash, and the old sanctuary of Israel was levelled to the ground. Such of the Priests as survived the catastrophe were scattered, here and there, throughout Israel. Samuel, apparently then a somewhat young man, betook himself to his native place in Rama. He was by far the most prominent ecclesiastic of those days, even though the priestly line of Heli was still represented in the elder brother of Ichabod—whose name indicates the time of his birth, that is to say, " the glory is departed," because the Ark of the Lord was taken from Israel. The mother of this Ichabod was the daughter-in-law of Heli, and she had given birth to her child the very day the news was carried to her father-in-law.

The God of Israel showed His appreciation of the presence of Samuel amongst the remnants of the people of God. Already Samuel had become a prophet in the strict sense of the word, for we read—" And Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel saying : If you turn to the Lord with all your heart, put away the strange gods from among you. Baalim and Astaroth. And prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistine." These were bold words to utter to a conquered people, who already had lost all hope, but Samuel was now not only the Priest; he was, above all, the prophet whose words were the words of the Lord, so when he gave the order—" Gather all Israel to Masphath that I may pray to the Lord for you," the people responded

right willingly. It was then that the Lord gave confirmation to the words of His prophet—" And it came to pass, when Samuel was offering the holocaust, the Philistines began the battle against Israel : but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on the day upon the Philistines and terrified them and they were overthrown before the face of Israel. And the men of Israel going out of Masphath pursued after the Philistines, and made slaughter of them till they came to Bethchar. And Samuel took a stone, and laid it between Masphath and Sen : and he called the place, the Stone of Help. And he said : Thus far the Lord hath helped us."

Most of the Priests found a safe shelter in the city of Nobe; but not a few retired, like Samuel, into the mountains and their native places—there to become, like him, more prophet than Priest. A greater responsibility fell to the lot of the prophetic tribe when Saul took vengeance on the city of Nobe—" And Doeg the Edomite turned, and fell upon the Priests, and slew in that day eighty-five men that wore linen ephod. And Nobe the city of the Priests he smote with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and ox and ass, and sheep, with the edge of the sword." In the conservation of the faith in the hearts of the people of Israel, the Priests had been a failure, and so arose the necessity for another class of apostle, whose chief member was of the priestly tribe, but whose actions were the actions of a prophet, whose words were the words of a prophet. How far Samuel contributed to the formation of the colleges of prophets that seem to be quite plentiful in the many parts of the land where the enemy was not in possession, it is rather difficult to say with any degree of certainty, but it cannot be doubted that he was in communication with the bands of prophets that roamed the towns and the villages and the mountain-passes where dwelt the people

of God. It is fairly safe to assert that he had much to do with the new spirit that became so active in his time, and still more active in the years to follow. He had seen the failure of the priestly race as a bulwark of the faith of the people, and he, being of a thoroughly practical turn of mind, approved of, if he did not introduce, this new method of combating the enemies of the Lord and of keeping in the hearts of the people a real affection for the God of Israel—the God of their fathers.

We have something like that movement in the years of the Church that were to see the activities of Francis, and Dominic, and many of the other great apostles of the newer spirit. When the flame of faith seemed on the point not only of flickering, but of dying out, then arose those mighty warriors of the Lord, who were first and foremost heralds and only in a secondary sense Priests; indeed, Francis was never more than a Deacon. We may add, side by side with that genuine movement of the Spirit of God in the Church of the Middle Ages we had another spirit neither genuine nor heavenly, yet to all appearances the same. It claimed its martyrs and its saints and its miracles and its manifestations. We cannot forget to recall the fact that history makes mention that there were not wanting disciples of theirs who went willingly to the death to substantiate the claims of this fictitious spirit.

There were years when it was difficult to discern where the Spirit was really breathing. There were "such signs as would have deceived even the elect if it were possible." In the New Dispensation there is always the Church to decide the doubts, and to solve the difficulties of the children of Christianity; otherwise, we should have been in no better position to judge than were those in the times of the prophets of the Old Dispensation. With the rise and progress of the prophets of the God of Israel there were not wanting

imitators who had not been called of God, but whose pretensions were, to all appearances, equal to the gifts of the former, and who, by a strange disposition of Providence, were allowed to deceive the people. The God of Israel would never permit that unauthorised bands of men should be allowed to roam through the homes of His people delivering what message seemed good to each, instructing the people in doctrines that could never lead to the preparation for the coming of the Messias. A certain definite character should be imprinted on the calling of men who were to be the precursors of the Lord. Nevertheless, men could not expect that on each member of the prophetic band Providence should set its seal as it did on Moses and Samuel and Elias, and even Eliseus. Hence, arose the necessity of some guiding hand, some recognised principle of government, amongst the men who professed to have left all to " praise " the Lord—and to " prophesy."

The example of Samuel, if for the present we discount his great prestige and authority amongst the scattered priesthood of Israel, was sufficient to collect into bands, temporary, if we chose to call them so, but nevertheless with a collection of facts and principles that could easily form the nucleus of a college or convent of those who were actuated by the prophetic spirit, including not only the priests, but all who felt that the redemption of Israel, and the bringing back of the Ark of the Lord to a place worthy of it, was to be accomplished by mediums more sincere than the older priesthood, by men who were prepared to sacrifice more than were the children of Heli.

Samuel seems to have had authority over some, at least, of the prophets of his time; and he evidently knew of the whereabouts of the various colleges—" And when thou shalt be come there into the city,

thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery and a timbrel, and a pipe, and a harp before them; and they shall be prophesying." The fact that Samuel is called a "seer" is explained in another verse of the First Book of Kings—"Now in the time past, in Israel when a man went to consult God he spoke thus: Come, let us go to the seer. For he that is now called a Prophet, in times past was called a Seer." We may reasonably conclude that there was a new element, or at least another characteristic, in the office of prophet from the days of Samuel.

Side by side with the prophets who were recognised as men of God, and called to the office of "prophesying," there were others who did not merit the name, though there is not any reason why we should underrate their powers, no matter whence came the influence that gave them such mastery over the things that seem to lie in the domain of God alone. So numerous did this tribe become that Saul had instituted a campaign against it. We read—"Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel mourned for him, and buried him in Ramatha his city. And Saul had put away all the magicians and soothsayers out of the land." Of their powers we have evidence in the interview between Samuel and the witch of Endor. At the behest of the king she called forth the spirit of Samuel—"And Samuel said to Saul: Why hast thou disturbed my rest, that I should be brought up?"

The weakness of Samuel, as a Judge, was to be attributed to the same cause that made the priesthood of Heli a failure, namely, his sons. Domestic life did not seem compatible with the higher duties of the sacred offices; and we have not the least doubt that the office of prophet could not be fulfilled by men who had contracted the necessary entanglements of the married

state. The successors of Samuel must have perceived as much. When we come upon Elias, in the Sacred Page, we find that he has no genealogy, nor did he allow to arise subsequent entanglements that could impede the absolutely necessary privations and long and laborious travels consequent on the prophetic calling. The true prophet, in the days that followed in Israel, was to battle for Israel without any of the family ties that made the mission of his predecessors a failure to a great extent.

After the vision on the Mount of God, Elias was very much changed in his mental attitude to the necessaries for the effective work to which he had dedicated his life, namely, to keep the people of Israel on the right path. We have no detailed account of the impressions made upon Elias by what he had seen and heard. It is certain the Lord had not brought His Prophet on the journey to Horeb for the simple things that are narrated in the Sacred Writings in connection with the vision. Not a few commentators have spent time and care on the conjectures that are made as to the significance of the storm, and the fire that preceded "the gentle whistling wind," but none have ventured to suggest what the Lord revealed to the Prophet on this momentous occasion in his life.

We have seen that the Prophet made his way immediately to Damascus, but what he did there is left also to conjecture. When he fulfills the third part of the mission given him, we have a detailed account, at least a sufficiently interesting and instructive narrative of the act; also the manner in which Eliseus received the message from the Lord in regard to his appointment as successor of Elias. From this we may conclude that the matter uppermost in the mind of the Prophet was the selection of Eliseus. Yet, even in this part of his mission, he does not behave as one would expect from

the Prophet of Fire. When the newly-appointed prophet asks permission from his master to tarry a while with his parents, the answer is—" I have done my part."

A new truth has been revealed to Elias. Prophets, such as he had been until the vision, were instruments for the Lord to thunder His messages into the ears of His people and to upbraid their ways, but the people of God had need of another and a more constant weapon to ward off the influences of those around who were given to the worship of false gods. There might be, and, indeed, were, times when the mighty earthquake was necessary to arouse the sleeping consciences of men, and at times the fire, irresistible as it was, could not be dispensed with; but then there was the gentle breeze, " the whistling of a gentle air," which was ever welcome and never caused any unnecessary violence, but in its own place was as valuable as the other two agencies, which from their very nature should not be constantly active. Such, now, was the position of the people of the Lord that they could never be completely cut off from outside influences; consequently, they were in want of a continual reminder of their duty to God and of their fidelity to their traditions. From the nature of its duties the Priesthood could not be availed of, so there was the necessity of another body of men whose counsels could ever be obtained, whose influences could be ever felt, and yet whose segregation from the great body of the people should be such that they would lose none of their power by familiarity, whose life should be so altered that there would be no family entanglements. Leaving all family ties, they would find in their fellow-enthusiasts sufficient friendship to keep them human, and in this there should be no hindrance to the duties attendant on their prophetic calling, for all were living for the God of Israel and each was aided by the other to undergo the sacrifices

that were to make their lives worthy of reverence in the eyes of the faithful child of Israel. Living apart from the common people, strengthened by the prayer and the spirit of mortification in their mountain solitudes, they were ever ready to obey the voice of their " Father " and descend into the highways and the bye-ways to talk to men; or, entrenched in their solitary homes, they could be found by the world-wearied men and women who knew that there was a God in Israel, and to Him they should appeal through those who lived for Him, and for Him alone. Such was the fruit of the vision of Elias, the Prophet. Behold the reason why he seeks immediately Eliseus. This is the reason why Eliseus obtained leave to kiss his father and his mother, for it was for the last time. This is why we hear of the Prophet Elias no more as a Prophet of Fire, save once only, that he issued forth—and as of old—to call the fires from heaven on the heads of men. He was like a silent volcano on the Mount of Carmel, but he was teaching others to follow, when necessary, in his footsteps. The fire that was once expended on the king of Israel was now transmitted to the men who, in turn, would give of their spirit to the ages to come. The prophetic body had become changed, and was now endowed with immortality. Elias was the Founder of this New Order, Eliseus was his Successor, and " the sons of the prophets " were to see the days of the Messias.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN MOUNTAIN SOLITUDE

To whichever chronological method we betake ourselves we are met with difficulties, not only in the ordinary events in the life of Elias, but even in the great events of his career when he was face to face with the highest powers of Israel. When historians write of the mission of Elias having been confined within the narrow limits of four or five years, they must be understood to mean only the great mission with which his name has been imperishably connected, and to the exclusion of that second mission which to us seems just as important, and even more so than the one connected with the abuses prevalent in the days of King Achab and his wife, Jezabel, namely, the establishing of a " School of the Prophets " which was to continue adown the ages, and which was not to cease even with the coming of the Messias. As the historian studies the events of " the chosen people " in their period of preparation for the advent of the Messias, it becomes more clear to him what effect the line of prophets patronised, if not initiated, by the Prophet had upon the life and the religion of the people to whom that line seemed—viewed from the spiritual standpoint—absolutely necessary. And it is a widely recognised fact that there is in our own times a religious body composed of men and women who draw their inspirations from their connection– which they maintain is a reasonably demonstrated connection—with the School patronised, or initiated, by the great Prophet himself.

The stirring events that immediately preceded and followed the " sacrifice on Carmel " are unquestionably allotted to the reign of Achab, who governed Israel beginning with the year 918 B.C. or the year 875 B.C. (according to the chronological reckoning followed) and ending with the year 897 B.C. or the year 854 B.C. It may be, moreover, remarked that these same events must be relegated to the later portion of his reign, since these occurrences were the result of a long period of scandalous transgressing on the part of the king and his consort. Under the worldly-wise government of Achab, the kingdom had made much material progress, which was attributed by some to the direct favor of the gods of the strangers. That the Prophet lived into the years of Ochozias is evident from the event, or events, in the reign of that monarch wherein the Prophet plays a very striking part. It is safe to say we know nothing with certainty in regard to the year in which Elias departed from this life, even though that event looms large in the annals of the " sons of the prophets " and has more than a passing memory in the pages of Holy Writ.

We are still in the region of certainty when we assert that the Prophet retired, at least for a time, to the solitude of his mountain cell after the anointing, or calling, of Eliseus. How long he remained in this seclusion we cannot with the same degree of certainty tell. It would be untrue to the character of the man of God if we were to infer that he was completely inactive until the Lord ordered him to meet the messengers of Ochozias. It is very true, however, that he seemed to have buried himself in an impenetrable solitude for the concluding years of the reign of the king whom he had chastened so severely—and seemingly, at times, to some purpose. Only once have we any indication that the old warrior of the Lord is in

the land of the living. Already we have referred to the incident connected with the usurpation of the vineyard of Naboth: when someone was required who could talk effectively and with purpose to the greatest power on earth, then it was that Elias was summoned from his solitude. Like Bernard of Clairvaux, he came from his mountain fastness at the word of the Lord and thundered the Law to princes and peoples; or might we not liken him better to the mountain storm that he himself had witnessed on Mount Horeb, which spared nothing, because it was the instrument of the Lord, but, having once performed its duty, gave way to the gentler wind that was soft and sweet to the ear. In that appearance to his old enemy Providence seems to insinuate that, when kings and princes were to be threatened and told their duty, there was no one so effective as he who had performed the work of the Lord on the Mount of Carmel, amidst fire and blood. One cannot find any greater acknowledgment of the power in the very name of Elias than the words which Achab addressed to him on that occasion—"Hast thou found me thy enemy?" Who else could have thundered out to the king who had defied—and to all appearances successfully—the Law of God and the traditions of the people?—"I have found thee, because thou art sold to do evil in the sight of the Lord. Behold I will bring evil upon thee, and I will cut down thy posterity and I will kill of Achab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up, and the last in Israel. And I will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nabat, and like the house of Baasa the son of Ahias: for what thou hast done, to provoke Me to anger, and for making Israel to sin." This much he has of a message for Achab himself, and now he turns to his old unrelenting enemy—"And of Jezabel also the Lord spoke saying: The dogs shall eat Jezabel in the field

of Jezrahel." In his fierce prophetic anger he does not hesitate to add that even if penance be done there is no escaping the penalty of the foul deed that had been done, for he adds—" If Achab die in the city, the dogs shall eat him : but if he die in the field, the birds of the air shall eat him."

No wonder that the Lord had called from the solitude of Carmel the old warrior, for no other presence could have so moved the cruel and cowardly king; no other words could have gone so directly to the heart of the man dominated by the masterful Jezabel. The long years of the drought, the magnificent spectacle on the Mount of Carmel, the terrible slaughter of the prophets of Baal and of the Groves—all these flashed back on the fear-stricken soul of the monarch. He knew that every word of the Prophet should see realisation. Apart from his own guilty conscience, he could not doubt the future should confirm the sentence of the man of God on him and on his wife and on their posterity.

From the Sacred Text we may presume that the man of God was in his cell on the mountain upon which he had collected those who were to undertake the work that the Lord had meted out for " the School of the Prophets " when the message came to him. Ever obedient to the word of the Lord, he left his prophetic children, girded his loins, and went to meet the king, who, as the Scriptures tell us, " arose and went down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezrahelite to take possession of it," as soon as he had heard of the death, or rather murder, of Naboth. As the heirs of Naboth had a legal right to his property in case of his demise, we must conclude that the murder of Naboth implies similar crimes against all of his house—we know not the number. The Mount of Carmel, whereon Elias was resting amidst the " sons of the prophets," lay to the north of both Samaria (from which the king was to set

out for his new possession) and Jezrahel (to which he was directing his steps); hence, whether the meeting-place was in the neighborhood of Samaria or Jezrahel the directions of the celestial messenger should be—"Arise and go down to meet Achab king of Israel." The words of the Sacred Text are fairly plain, and indicate that the meeting between the king and the Prophet was in Jezrahel—if not in the very vineyard of the murdered Naboth. The exact words are—"And thou shalt speak to him saying: Thus saith the Lord: Thou hast slain. Moreover also thou hast taken possession." It is evident, then, that the Prophet made his way through the plain of Esdrelon up to the gates of Jezrahel, near to the walls of which, as we have before mentioned, was the vineyard of Naboth, close by the palace of Achab.

Although Carmel was in the neighborhood of the city of Jezrahel, it is not at all probable that the Prophet, living in strict seclusion with his prophetic brethren, knew anything of the terrible fate of Naboth and all his family. Some have spoken of him as one of the "sons of the prophets"; just as others would have him of the royal family. If he were one of the faithful followers of the Prophet, there is no doubt that the prophetic family should have heard somewhat of the great calamity which had befallen one of their brethren. If we adhere to the words of the story, as told in the Sacred Text, there is the one only conclusion, namely, that Elias was warned, in the time of prayer, of the affair in regard to Naboth; and, at the same time, he was charged by the Lord to be the messenger of wrath to the sinful king. It is quite evident from the manner in which the Prophet performed his duty that he had lost none of his old fire or zeal by repose on Carmel. Even if his name had been omitted by the writer of the Chronicles, the attentive reader of the Books of Kings

should have guessed that the messenger who struck terror into the heart of the ruler of Israel was none other than he who was justly called " the Prophet of Fire."

What must have been the astonishment of the Prophet when he saw with his own eyes the effects of his daring impeachment of the king, and that, too, before his very face! " And when Achab had heard these words, he rent his garments." This action was the sign of the true sorrow of the king, for, in thus tearing his royal apparel, he signified his unworthiness to be the anointed of the Lord. Elias could not resist recalling that the fires of Carmel and the slaughter of the prophets had not produced such effect on the heart and mind of the king. Changed the king might have been when he descended from the Mount of Carmel, but the appearance of Jezabel on the scene put to flight any good resolutions that the king had formed on that memorable occasion. The words that must have seared the very soul of the king produced their immediate effects on this occasion. Neither was the emotion a mere passing movement of the cowardly soul of the king, for we learn that he not only " rent his garments," but that " he put on haircloth upon his flesh, and fasted and slept in sackcloth and walked with his head cast down."

Elias was little moved by the conduct of the king. Doubtless, he believed it only a passing exhibition on the part of the weak king. He was content that he had delivered his message as the Lord had desired, and, then, evidently had retired once more to his mountain solitude, unaware of the mighty storm that had bent to the very earth the royal tree of Israel. Once more the Voice of the Lord penetrates the silence of the mountain cell. This time there is good news to announce. It is nothing less than the complete success

of the last mission of the Prophet—" And the word of the Lord came to Elias the Thesbite, saying : Hast thou not seen Achab humbled before Me? Therefore because he hath humbled himself for My sake, I will not bring the evil in his days : but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house."

Several years must have elapsed since Elias had met with Achab, the king. The greeting of the king in the moment when he sees the Prophet has presented to the various commentators many difficulties. The only matter that concerns us is that a long time must have elapsed since their previous meeting. The sudden disappearance of the man of God after the affair on Mount Carmel must have led the king to the belief that he had seen the last of the Prophet. The call of Eliseus must have been the occasion for many to draw the conclusion that Elias had retired from all active participation in the affairs of Israel. Eliseus was, indeed, the Head of " the Prophetic School," but the real Founder was Elias, and he was still taking a very deep interest in its well-being. Like a slumbering volcano on the mountain-top, he was there, and just as full of fire and thunder as ever, but he was awaiting the occasion when the Lord would have need of his services; and, during the waiting time, he was busy pouring into the souls of others the great zeal and the mighty power that were to be the characteristics of his spiritual children in the years to come.

He, himself, must have wondered at the sudden breakdown of the king, and still more must he have been astounded at the continued penance of the husband of Jezabel. When the celestial voice announced to him the verdict of mercy on the repentant king, a strange impression must have been aroused in the mind of Elias. Then and there, the lesson that he had been taught on the Mount of Horeb must have come home

to him. The king who had resisted the wonderful manifestation on the Mount of Carmel was reduced to obedience and penance by the words uttered by the man who came from the mountain's brow. What the mighty storm that swept the mountain-side could not do; what the devouring fire had not been able to accomplish, the gentle wind whispering mildly along brought to pass. The words of the hermit from his lonely cell on Carmel effected what the fires from heaven failed to accomplish; what all the blood shed in the Cison could not bring to pass. The lesson was an important one for Elias and was not lost on him. He returned to his "prophetic School" determined more than ever to send into the highways and the by-ways, as often as the Lord would desire, men who had learned the way to the hearts of men by prayer and fasting in solitude.

Although King Achab did not continue to the end of his life in the good resolutions with which he was inspired at this important meeting with the Prophet, nevertheless, we cannot doubt of the sincerity of his conversion on this occasion, for the forceful reason that the Lord remitted much of the penalty entailed by the callous crime of Achab and Jezabel. It is very doubtful that the blood of the king himself was to undergo the same ignominy as described in the words of Elias—"In this place, wherein the dogs have licked the blood of Naboth, they shall lick thy blood," unless we accept the words in their broader application to the blood of his progeny. The conversion was sincere and, in so far as a weak-willed character of the type of Achab can be permanently altered, the message seems to have gone home to the heart of the king. Elias, when he heard from the celestial messenger of the nature of the conversion and how it had turned the wrath of the Almighty from the king, must have adverted to the

causes at work to produce such speedy repentance and such a seemingly permanent state of mind on the part of the king. He had long since renounced the active life, and was probably not a little perturbed that he should be called upon by the Lord after his time of retirement from the world. Like the obedient soldier of the God of Israel, he did the work assigned to him. He went to the meeting with Achab in quite a different frame of mind to that with which he went to Jezrahel, years before, to the conversion of the queen. The years were crowding upon him, and the experiences that he had already undergone were now mellowed by prayer and solitude. He was not so full of his present mission as he had been of old full of his mission to Achab. He went on his mission, not as an individual, but as a member of a body of men who, whilst he was in active service, were, like Moses of old, holding up their hands on the mountain-top beseeching the Lord that the mission of their brother, who was at the same time their Founder, might be a success. He was, no doubt, the chosen instrument of the Lord, but he was, likewise, an instrument twice consecrated to the work of redeeming the people of the unhappy Israel. He seems to have thrown himself into the work with his usual ardor, but he never forgot that he was only one of a great body of men—many of whom were just as full of zeal as he was, very many of whom had earned by their lives to be worthy instruments of the Lord—but, above all, he did not forget that he was now supported by the prayers of every one of those men who had left the world and consecrated their lives to God.

When, then, the result of the message to the king was announced to Elias, he was not at a loss as to the source whence came this blessing upon his work. What a world of difference is there not between the Elias who frets and fumes at the failure of his mission after the

events on Carmel and the Elias who quietly retires to his mountain-cell after he has delivered his message and does not even ask as to the result of his work—indeed, seemingly, is not interested in that result until he is told by the celestial voice, or, might we not say with greater truthfulness, was questioned as to his want of knowledge relative to the change of heart in the king. The manner in which the messages were delivered is one and the same in each case; the method of preparation and the seeming indifference to results have nothing in common in the two occurrences. We have in the one case Elias, fiery and zealous, but standing alone even as the instrument of the God of Israel; in the other case we see Elias tamed as to the fiery nature, and somewhat subdued as to the demonstration of his zeal, but now no longer alone, but the representative of an army drawn up on the mountain-sides and hidden in the silent cells of Carmel, an army mighty in the face of the Lord. The "sons of the prophets" are now his brethren, and he speaks in their name. The great "School of the prophets" has come into being in a manner that gives it security of years and of authoritative usefulness. Elias is no longer a prototype of Peter the Hermit, but is decidedly a forerunner of men like Bernard of Clairvaux, who, no matter how important his work, never forgot what he owed to the men in the desert, whose hands were uplifted for him that his work should be for the glory of God and the good of men.

The remaining years of the reign of Achab were evidently not marked by any of the public and glaring treacheries to the Law and the Traditions of Israel. We are far from believing that he acted in the spirit of a true follower of David, or that he was mindful of all the obligations incumbent on the royal representative of the Israelitish nation. His conduct, just before his

death, and on the occasion of his going to war with Syria, gives more than a passing glimpse into the religious sentiments of Achab in what we know to be the last days of that monarch. He seems to have been temporising all through the remaining years of his life, being tossed about by the knowledge of what was right and by the sinister influence of his wife, Jezabel. In the matter of prophets and seers he appears to have halted midway between the prophets of the strangers and the men of God. He had recourse to bodies of men who, without authority, exercised for gain, or a livelihood, the prophetic office. His standard of probity in those men was a peculiar one, namely, he sought out, and believed, those who told him things that were pleasing. In these he reposed trust, but for any of the prophetic body who should foretell evil of any kind to himself or the nation he had nothing but loathing and hatred. With that extraordinary credence in the power to foresee the future, Achab, before he began his war with the Syrian monarch and his tributaries, "assembled the prophets, about four hundred men, and he said to them: Shall I go Ramath Galaad to fight, or shall I forbear? They answered: Go up, and the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king."

We do not for a moment accept the comments of some writers who would make of these men who are called "prophets," servants of Baal or of Astarthe or any of the gods of the strangers. Such an act should have brought down the immediate anger of the God of Israel; and then, forth from the high places of Carmel should have come the men who were the true servants of God, to thunder the truth into the ears of all Israel. It is quite evident that no subsequent event in the reign of Achab merited that the Lord should call from his solitude the Prophet of Fire—now justly called the Prophet of Carmel, because Carmel seems to have been

his home and the home of his faithful followers and disciples, whom he was instructing in the prophetic science to be continued throughout the centuries. Elias was now growing into " the sear and yellow leaf," and the day of his departure from their midst was approaching.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE APOSTOLIC LINE AMIDST THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS

We have already referred to the different classes of prophets. Some were the ministers of the gods of the strangers; some were nothing save mere clairvoyants, seers, or soothsayers; some were men who had been trained in the proper schools, but who were responsible to no authority, and, although of good life and good intentions, did not seem to be the chosen ministers of the God of Israel. Some were living in the recognised schools and subject to authority, and regulated their lives according to the dictates of their spiritual guides. It would be idle to deny that some of these prophets were actuated by motives that were very high and holy; it would be just as idle to deny that many of them were the agents of evil powers. The acts of the latter were such as to deceive even the friends of the God of Israel, not to speak of those who had no real claim to the truth on their part. The former were not always the accredited servants of the Lord, for at times some of them overstepped their limited faculties and, being unaided by the Lord, took refuge in suggestions and guesses. Those who were under the influence of diabolical power told only so much of the truth as was permitted them. Those who undertook to tell the future by the power of the God of Israel must have had a special calling to that office irrespective of the manner of life that was lived in the solitudes of the Holy Mount or in the lonely deserts. At once we can see the necessity for some rule, or some visible signs, by which the true prophet could be recognised. At a

glance we can estimate the great necessity for some authority to decide who was speaking the truth and who was the agent of deception—a token or figure of the mighty Gift which Christ would give to His Church.

The confusion that reigned in the prophetic world in the years of Elias, and precisely towards the concluding years of King Achab, is evident from the twenty-second chapter of the Third Book of Kings. Josaphat, the king of Juda, had agreed to join Achab in the war on Syria, and with true oriental curiosity said to his royal friend—" Inquire, I beseech thee, this day, the word of the Lord." Then " the king of Israel assembled the prophets," as we have mentioned in the concluding paragraph of the last chapter. Josaphat had been a friend of the Lord, and had done well in his royal office, so much so that he deserved the favor of the Lord. Consequently, he did not seem to have great or sincere belief in the " prophets of Israel." The Sacred Page leaves us to conjecture why the pious king did not feel confidence in the men who seemed good enough for his royal companion, and we may not doubt that Achab naturally was as much interested in the final result of the war as he was. Hence, we read—" And Josaphat said : Is there not here some prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire by him." The reply of Achab was characteristic of the man, as well as of his times—" And the king of Israel said to Josaphat : There is one man left, by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Micheas, the son of Jemla ; but I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good to me, but evil."

The royal messenger who was sent to seek Micheas gave the prophet a friendly warning—" Behold the words of the prophets with one mouth declare good things to the king. Let thy word therefore be like to theirs, and speak that which is good." Although Micheas made a manly protest as to his future

prophesying, nevertheless, we find him falling in with the opinions, or rather worldly-wise forecasts, of his predecessors, who evidently did not enjoy the same reputation for—what we might term for the want of a better word—" apostolicity." It was only when the king appealed to him in a very solemn manner that he revealed the truth—" But the king said to him: I adjure thee again and again that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord."

The importance attached to the office of prophesying appears very plainly in this chapter of the Chronicles, for we read—" Then the king of Israel, and Josaphat king of Juda, sat each on his throne clothed with royal robes, in a court by the entrance of the gate of Samaria: and all the prophets prophesied before them." Should we question the value of the well-founded faith of Achab, the king of Israel, since he had never shown any great fervor for the Law and the Traditions of Israel, we have still the recognised faith of Josaphat, whose life was, if not exemplary, at least worthy of praise; and we cannot, for a moment, doubt the confidence shown by him in the prophets. The fact that " Sedecias the son of Chanaana made himself horns of iron and said: Thus saith the Lord: With these shalt thou push Syria, till thou destroy it," does not give the scene any unreality, for such was the manner of expressing certain facts of prophesy. With the recognised prophets of the Lord it was not an unfamiliar thing that they should, by such manner of acting, give force and reality to their prophesying.

The danger underlying all prophesying is apparent from the vision as detailed by Micheas—" And the Lord said: Who shall deceive Achab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth Galaad? And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said: I will deceive him. And the Lord said to

him: By what means? And he said: I will go forth and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the Lord said: Thou shalt deceive him, and shall prevail. Go forth, and do so. Now therefore behold the Lord hath given a lying spirit in the mouth of thy prophets that are here: and the Lord hath spoken evil against thee." The many learned disquisitions given to explain the divine intervention in the matter are not of moment to us, at this time. We see that the prophets, and even those that at other times might be depended upon for prophesy, were not immune from false visions, neither were they secure against giving unwise and unreliable information as to the future: in a word, they could not boast of any kind of infallibility *ex-officio*. Such a state of affairs could be prevented only by men living under authority who could claim from the God of Israel immunity from errors of this kind, men whose lives should be in conformity with the great principles and the dictates of the Law and the Traditions of Israel, so that the Lord would find in them suitable instruments for the accomplishing of His designs. This, indeed, seems to have been the object of the demand of Josaphat, the king of Juda, when he asked for a prophet of the Lord so that true information of the results of the expedition against Syria might be known beforehand.

No doubt seems to have been entertained by the leader amongst the prophets in the court of Achab as to the honesty of the prophecies of himself and his prophetic brethren. This much is evident from the indignation shown when Micheas told the kings of the deception to be practised on them by the prophets as the instruments of another power. The Chronicles tell us—"And Sedecias the son of Chanaana came and struck Micheas on the cheek and said: Hath the spirit of the Lord left me, and spoken to thee?" The only

answer vouchsafed by the stricken prophet was the obvious and the very practical one—" Thou shalt see in the day when thou shalt go into a chamber within a chamber to hide thyself." Micheas had no fear of the final result of the expedition being other than the Lord had shown him in the vision—" And Micheas said : If thou return in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me."

Elias was perfectly aware of the confusion and the uncertainty that reigned amongst the prophets. On Carmel he had shown his contempt for the prophets of Baal and the prophets of the Groves. Now, in the altered times, the greatest danger was from those who believed that they were called of God, or at least were of opinion that they were engaged in an office that was not only legitimate but praiseworthy. He knew well that, for ages to come, the prophetic band should be of the utmost importance to the Hebrew people—not only in their capacity as foretellers of the future, but in their ordinary communication with the people who would seek their advice and their counsel; in addition, they were to be the agencies wherein reposed the living fire of the Law and the Traditions of " the chosen people." His idea of the lives of such servants of Yahveh was a high and exalted one. Men who were to be the repositories of what was best in Israel and Juda must have a sanction not only for the extraordinary things they were called upon to do, but they must likewise live in such a manner as not to be a reproach to the people, but rather an inspiration. Such was the task that the Prophet had laid out for himself—that is to say, to form men who by word and act would show that they were fitting instruments of the God of Israel, worthy councillors of the people, suitable repositories of the faith of " the chosen people."

That the Lord was pleased with the work which Elias

was doing on Carmel is evident from the fact that, when any great and important mission was to be performed, He did not forget the old warrior of Carmel. It was Elias who spoke to Achab at the critical time when he had fallen so far as to usurp the property of the murdered Naboth. When Achab had paid the penalty of his treason to Israel and was laid to rest in the city of Samaria, his son Ochozias succeeded him, and followed only too faithfully in the footsteps of his father. Elias was yet living with his disciples on Mount Carmel and, doubtless, directing the other communities of " the sons of the prophets " that had entered on the true path for the glory of Israel and Juda.

Ochozias had been already two years on the throne of Israel when a very serious accident happened to him. He fell through the " lattices of his upper chamber which he had in Samaria." Fearful that his end had come, he sent messengers to consult Beelzebub, the god of Accaron, as to his chance " of recovering of his illness." This was an offence against the Law and the Traditions of the people of God—he, the king of Israel, the representative of " the chosen people," was sending to a heathen god to consult him.

Beelzebub was the god of flies, and was so called because his power and influence were always invoked against the maladies that arose from the bites of the insects and flies that are the pest of every nation in the East. Such is really the meaning of the title given to this god, who was Baal under one of his many aliases. Baal as the great principle of heat was very favorable to the multiplication of those flies and insects, and, of a consequence, all who were afflicted by them sought relief from their maladies by invoking him and trying to appease him. In so far as the cause of the malady of the king is clearly stated, we cannot assume that he had any reason to invoke the aid of Beelzebub in his *rôle* of

"fly-god." We turn to the other explanation that Beelzebub was called on for other reasons than maladies arising out of any pest created by flies or insects. Accaron seems to have been a special shrine of the god Beelzebub. When the Philistines seized the ark of the Covenant, Accaron was one of the cities to which it was brought, but the citizens at once protested—"Therefore they sent the ark of God into Accaron. And when the ark of God was come into Accaron, the Accaronites cried out, saying: They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people." It is not at all improbable that at this period there was a shrine or temple of Baal in Accaron. The city was at that time in the hands of the Philistines, although at a subsequent time it fell under the power of Juda, and then became the possession of the tribe of Dan. The people seem to have held on to their superstitious worship of the heathen god.

The backsliding of the king of Israel, Ochozias, had been notorious, but the sending to consult the god of Accaron was the last straw to break down the barrier to the long pent-up anger of the Lord. Once more the warrior of Israel is called upon, because no other could so speak to the royal scion, no other voice, no other presence, could so move the son of Achab and Jezabel as could those of Elias—"And an angel of the Lord spoke to Elias the Thesbite, saying: Arise and go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them: Is there not a God in Israel, that ye go to consult Beelzebub the god of Accaron?" It is easy to imagine the horror and the shame of the Prophet to know that the representative of the people of God should go to consult a heathen god. Most willingly would he leave his mountain solitude and the company of his prophetic brethren to chastise the unfaithful representative of Israel. To the royal messengers the

Prophet must have denounced in scathing terms their master's infidelity, although the Sacred Page gives us only the mere sentence—" Arise and go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them: Is there not a God in Israel, that ye go to consult Beelzebub the god of Accaron? Wherefore thus saith the Lord: From the bed on which thou art gone up, thou shalt not come down; but thou shalt surely die. And Elias went away."

The messengers were totally unaware of the name of the person who addressed them, nevertheless, they were so impressed with his message, and the manner in which it was delivered, that they made bold to retrace their steps—a hazardous proceeding in such a duty as had been imposed on them. " And the messengers turned back to Ochozias. And he said to them: Why are you come back?" The king knew that no ordinary occurrence could have prevailed on the royal couriers to turn back to Samaria when he, himself, had told them to go to Accaron. Curiosity overcame the natural annoyance that an Eastern monarch should feel in such a case; hence, the sick man turned to them and demanded the cause of their presence when they should have been far on their way to their goal. The reply of the messengers is very simple; indeed, its simplicity excites greater curiosity in the king than could any exaggerated description of their feelings on hearing the message of the bold intruder, and on beholding his presence, which conveyed a sense of obligation to do as they had been told—" A man met us, and said to us: Go, and return to the king that sent you, and you shall say to him: Thus saith the Lord: Is it because there was no God in Israel that thou sendest to Beelzebub, the god of Accaron?" It is apparent that there were still in Israel men who had the gift of prophecy, men who were recognised as the servants of God, men who

could be legitimately consulted, and whose office was not alien to foresee the things that were to be. Had "the prophetic School" been in a state of confusion at the time, so that it might have been difficult to know the servants of the God of Israel, then there should have been little point in the question of Elias. The culpability of the king could not have been so serious—and it evidently was most serious—if there had been no prescribed line of demarcation between the men who could boast of what we have termed "apostolicity" and those who were pretenders to the true prophetic science. Indeed, in this question, Elias stands out as the champion of the men whose lives had been consecrated to Israel and to God, and whose knowledge of the divine workings might be overlooked, but could never be denied; might have been neglected, but never could have been questioned.

That the messengers and the king and all Israel should know that the prophetic power as given by God was still in the "sons of the prophets," Elias thunders out the divine sentence on the sick king—"Therefore thou shalt not come down from the bed on which thou art gone up; but thou shalt surely die." It was useless, then, to go to Accaron, it was vain to seek further the information desired by the king, if the Prophet who spoke had any right to exercise the prophetic office. It did not occur for one moment to the royal messengers to dispute the right of the stranger to stop their progress on the way to Accaron; still less did it enter their minds to question the truth of the message delivered to them. The message sent to the king had in itself, and in the manner of its delivering, sufficient credentials to silence the doubts of the royal couriers and of the king himself. At once the sick man asks for a description of the Prophet who had given the message. Very terse, but very expressive, is the reply—"But they said: A

hairy man with a girdle of leather about his loins." As we have elsewhere remarked, the particulars given for the identification of the stranger were not very full, and certainly not very exhaustive; nevertheless, the king at once exclaims: "It is Elias the Thesbite."

The name and the memory of the Prophet who had brought to penance his royal father were not unknown to Ochozias. Neither can we doubt that the life to which the Prophet had betaken himself must have been well known by all who took an interest in the fate of the people of Israel. There surely must have been something in the brief indications given by the messengers that spoke of the prophetic calling. The mantle and the girdle are referred to in a special manner. A cloak of sheepskin or of goat's hair must have been the distinguishing garment of the prophetic tribe. The garment recognised in the time of the prophet Zachary was of sackcloth; but, then, it was worn for a special signification. The question as to the material which formed the cloak of Elias has received far more attention than it really deserves; but the idea in making investigations into the matter is, if possible, to ascertain the form and the material of that which was a distinguishing mark of the prophetic tribe that followed the rule of life, in so far as such was possible, of the prophets Elias and Eliseus. If we admit that there were any peculiarities in the cloak of the prophet by which he could be recognised from all other classes of men we should be inclined to the opinion that the cloak of Elias and his disciples was formed from the skin of the mountain goats that were constantly on the hills and mounts of the regions wherein these prophets had found homes. The form of the cloak should be of such a nature that it could keep out the cold, so prevalent at nearly every period of the year, especially during the nights, on the mountains and the high hills—the usual

places of abode of " the prophetic School." There is no doubt that, if we grant that there was a certain body of men who followed a certain mode of life and whose members were connected by bonds of religious vocation, it follows very naturally that this body should have some distinguishing mark; and that it was far more convenient that the mark should be in the cloak, which was the outer garment. Indeed, nearly all classes had their distinguishing clothing. Especially was there a distinction in the cloak. The men in royal offices, the warriors, the women—in fact, the very days of the year—had their distinguishing colors and garments. Especially is this true of the Priesthood, and we have already seen the connection between the Priesthood and the prophetic body, at least in the early years of the prophetic institution.

Not so much erudition has been expended by the prophetic followers of Elias in regard to the cincture, although we are of opinion that the description given of the Prophet makes mention of the " leather girdle " in a most significant way. The girdle was a very popular garment amongst all the ancient peoples and, even more than the cloak, had its various significations according to its form and the material of which it was composed. The word, as it is used in common parlance to-day, would give us a misconception of the uses of the girdle amongst the ancients. The length of this garment varied according to times, and places, and also conditions of life. It was a rather long and ornamental appendage, as mentioned in the Apocalypse—" And in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, one like the Son of man clothed with a garment down to the feet and girt about the paps with a golden girdle." And, again, we have the same idea of the girdle—" And the seven angels came out of the temple girt about the breasts with golden girdles." Some such girdle, in

regard to length, must have been the garments given to our First Parents when they were expelled from Paradise—" And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skins, and clothed them." The girdle had so many uses that it would be impossible to recall them all in the present work—even if it were useful to do so. It was in the girdle that the warrior carried his weapons; and it was in his girdle that the traveller carried most of his belongings; it was in the girdle that the women kept the various little conveniences without which their life should be full of annoyances. The traveller without his girdle could make no headway on his journey, and the warrior without his girdle could not enter the list to do battle for himself or his country. The girdle was the garment that was wont to carry the evidences of wealth and authority. The Priest in his sacred office carried his girdle; indeed, the High-Priest had a girdle of special design and of special material. Of Samuel, who, as we have seen, was both Priest and prophet, we read—" But Samuel ministered before the face of the Lord: being a child girded with a linen ephod." It is not at all likely that Samuel, even after the dispersion of the Priests or Levites, omitted to use the girdle indicative of his office and position. At the same time we cannot assume that it was made of leather, such as, we are informed, was worn by the Prophet of Carmel. It seems to us quite probable that Elias had formed a distinctive girdle for the prophetic School, and that it should, by its nature, be suggestive of the manner of life that the disciples of the new " School of prophets " had chosen. Indeed, in the years that immediately followed on the preaching of the Gospel, the girdle adapted to the regions wherein the early Christian monks dwelt was, perhaps, the only garment worn by them. We have no hesitation in saying that it was in

this girdle that the " scapular " of the monk found its origin. This latter reason is sufficient for the justification of the rather long notice we have given here in reference to the " girdle of leather " mentioned by the Chronicler as one of the distinctive garments of the Prophet when he appeared to the messengers of King Ochozias, and which evidently was one of the signs by which he was able to exclaim—" It is Elias the Thesbite."

Although the sick king had recognised by the description given him that it was the Prophet of Carmel who had spoken to his couriers, nevertheless, somewhat of the power and the might of the man of God must have been almost forgotten in the years that followed his last encounter with Achab. Unless this much is assumed, it would be difficult to account for the idea that at once possessed the mind of the king that he could bring by force the man of God, so that he might personally interrogate him. Had he recollected the scene on Carmel, and had he known sufficiently of the terror that had made his father put on sackcloth and ashes for the evil deed done to the house of Naboth, he surely should never have tried to bring the Prophet to his way of thinking by force. Evidently Ochozias was a young man, and had inherited some of the characteristic weakness of his father. Men of this type are apt to exaggerate their own importance and to forget the deference due to those who are in touch with the supernatural. Whatever spirituality he possessed seemed to have led him to cultivate a superstitious dread of the gods to whom his mother had ever been a faithful friend, and for whom she was always prepared to do battle. He must have known of the prophets of the God of Israel, for the vision of Micheas was quite recent, and it was to the realisation of it that he owed his place on the throne of Israel. It is, however, almost sufficient to account for all his dread of

Beelzebub, and his irreverence towards the great Prophet, to know that he was a worthy son of Jezabel.

The king, at once, called the soldiers who were his bodyguard. He sent a captain, and with him no less than fifty men, so that the capture of the Prophet should be certain. The fact that so many men were sent gives us an opportunity of knowing that he did not put the man of God on a level with an ordinary malefactor. We do not know the exact place where the Prophet intercepted the royal messengers. It must have been some place between Samaria and the place of their destination, Accaron. We are inclined to the opinion that it was quite near the city of Samaria, wherein the king lay sick. Warned beforehand by the celestial voice, it was easy for the Prophet to leave Carmel and await the messengers as they made their way from the city in the direction of the south. It is not even probable that the man of God awaited the returning couriers or whoever should be sent to verify their statements. Hence, we may assume that the soldiers were sent to the well-known abode of the Prophet, namely, Carmel. This would exactly coincide with the words of the Chronicler, that is to say—" And he " (meaning the captain or leader of the soldiers) " went up to him as he was sitting on the top of a hill." Meeting Elias in his home amongst the hills, and probably not far from the company of his disciples, would account for the salutation with which the official of Ochozias addresses the man for whose arrest he was sent—" Man of God, the king hath commanded that thou come down." He may never before have seen the Prophet and, in the surroundings in which he now sees him, the impression is given him that he is dealing with one who has a claim to the divine companionship. The salutation in so far as he addresses Elias is, we believe, sufficiently expressive of the internal feelings conceived by the soldier,

but neither does he forget the power of his master, the king. He gives the Prophet to understand that he has definite orders, and that, these orders being from the king, no man dare disobey. With the usual soldier-like attention to duty, he lets the Prophet see that he intends to carry out the will of his master.

Elias has no fear of the puny king who lies on his bed of death; but all Israel must be taught a lesson, and that lesson is respect for the men who have dedicated their lives to God, and have taken on their shoulders the mantle of His protection. Doubtless, the Prophet should have desired better to have the matter settled with the chief actor in the drama of treachery to the Law and Traditions of Israel; but he must first, here and now, deal with the instrument. The soldier must be taught his lesson of obedience to a higher power. The hands of the secular power must not be placed on the men anointed and called of God; and, should there be any interference, then even the instruments must suffer. For the captain and his fifty men the Prophet had nothing but sympathy. He knew they were merely doing the work of their master; but that work was unholy work, and those who took part in it must pay the penalty.

The Prophet takes up the challenge proffered to him by the captain—"And Elias answering said to the captain of fifty: If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee, and thy fifty." Scarcely had the words gone forth from the mouth of Elias, when the heavens opened and a mighty flame swept along the hill-side whereon stood the captain and his men. With the fiery blast passed along the souls of the unfortunate soldiers; their bodies lay charred on the fire-scorched sward. The Prophet of Fire turned to his prayers and his meditation; in all probability to pray for a merciful judgment at the

throne of God for the instruments of an unholy power in Israel. This impressive sight—this ever-memorable lesson to the princes of the world—is contained in a few lines in the Sacred Chronicles: "And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him, and the fifty that were with him." Not a few commentators would have it that the captain had been arrogant in his treatment of the Prophet, and so merited his sad fate. This does not appear plain to us, for the manner of address was sufficiently respectful, and it was the command that ought not to have been given, and if given, ought never be reiterated even by officials. The fact that the soldiers shared the same fate as their captain is an evidence that the command of the Prophet, that fire should come and destroy them, was not a penalty due solely to the conduct of the captain.

The king, though grievously sick, showed himself a true son of the Prophet's arch-enemy, Jezabel. When he had heard of the destruction of the captain and his fifty companions, he became more insistent that the Prophet should be arrested and brought before him—"And again he sent to him another captain of fifty men and his fifty with him. And he said to him: Man of God, thus saith the king: Make haste and come down."

The second captain sent to the Prophet must have approached his mission with less courage than did the first; but there was nothing for him to do but give the command, and in the language of the king. This time the king added to his former command words that could not be regarded as other than disrespectful to the man of God. It was in no mere fit of anger that Elias had punished the former messenger of the king. The strongest proof that it was not the fiery nature of the Prophet acting on first impulses that caused the fire to come from heaven is the fate that befell the second

captain and his fifty soldiers. The reverence due to the man of God, and the respect that should have been shown to men called, as the Prophet was, had been wanting in the conduct of the king; hence, all who had anything to do with that irreverence and disrespect were included in the terrible punishment. The king was not to escape, as we shall see: everyone who participated in this act of his should participate in the anger that the God of Israel had towards all who would contemn His servants. As happened to the first captain and his men, so in like manner did it happen to the second captain and his fifty—"Elias answering, said: If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And fire came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty." This second lesson was evidently sufficient to convince the king that he was dealing with one whom the powers of heaven would obey, and who could, and would, demand that the courtesy due to his state must be shown even by a king.

Having heard of the fate of the second contingent sent to the mountain-side to bring the Prophet, the king became more desirous still to see him who could command the fires of heaven. His hatred of the Prophet now turned to an ardent wish to make friends with him, in order that he might obtain from him a guarantee of renewed life and strength. With a very practical duplicity he sends for a friend of the Prophet, or at least for one who was known to be in the good graces of the prophetic body, and now commits to him the wish that the Prophet would come: this time it is an act of courtesy that is demanded. Nothing was to be gained from the Prophet by threats or commands, so the king descends to persuasion and courtesy—"Again he sent a third captain of fifty, and the fifty that were with him. And when he was come, he fell

upon his knees before Elias, and besought him and said: Man of God, despise not my life, and the lives of thy servants that are with me. Behold fire came down from heaven, and consumed the two first captains of fifty men and the fifties that were with them: but now I beseech thee to spare my life." No matter how reverential was the conduct of the soldiers on this occasion, it is evident that a great terror had seized on them, for they knew of the fate of their comrades who had come to the mountain before them. They were well aware of the sinister purpose that had actuated the king, at least in the beginning of his enterprise, in commanding that the Prophet should be brought before him. The captain had proclaimed himself and the soldiers who were with him as "the servants" of the man of God; hence, Elias knew that, not only had the messengers been changed in their sentiments towards the anointed of God, but he likewise recognised that the king had no longer any design of treating disrespectfully his person nor of punishing the servants of the God of Israel.

"And the angel of the Lord spoke to Elias saying: Go down with him. Fear not. He arose therefore and went down with him to the king." Elias, as the instrument of the God of Israel, had taught a salutary lesson to the king and to all Israel, and thus he could now afford to visit the king. The angel had told him that there was no danger now from anything that the king could do, and that it was the will of the Lord that he should go and speak to the king.

The interview between the man of God and the king must have been very brief, for the shades of death had already fallen on the house of Ochozias, and his days were verily numbered. It was too late to upbraid the king with his infidelities and his treacheries to the God of Israel, and the Prophet was too practical a man to

lose time in preaching penance to the man who was past all possibility of doing further injury to the faith and morals of the people of Israel. One thing remained for the Prophet to do, and that was to announce the verdict of the Lord to the sick monarch—so that all Israel should know that he had been chastised by the God of Israel, and that he, no more than his father, had escaped the doom pronounced upon the whole tribe of Achab and Jezabel. And the Prophet said to the king—"Thus saith the Lord: Because thou hast sent messengers to consult Beelzebub the god of Accaron, as though there were no God in Israel, of whom thou mightest inquire the word; therefore from the bed on which thou art gone up thou shalt not come down, but shalt surely die." The words that follow in the Chronicles are very brief, but very significant—"So he died according to the word of the Lord which Elias spoke."

CHAPTER XXX

THE "PASSING" OF ELIAS

In the preceding chapter we have given the account of the last public appearance of Elias. Henceforth, we know of him only in the company of his brethren. The salutary lesson administered to the son of Achab must have had its effect on his successor, for he did not offend against the God of Israel to the same extent as had done his father and his brother. We do not know in what year of the reign of King Joram the Prophet was taken up in the fiery chariot. We do know that this king reigned about eleven or twelve years and in all probability it was in his reign that that important event in the history of "the sons of the prophets" occurred.

In the meantime "the sons of the prophets" must have undergone a radical change as to their method of living and as to the ideals that now were held out to them. All this must have been the work of Elias. What we might call the old and solid foundations that formed the basis of the rule of "the sons of the prophets" had not been given up or abandoned. On the contrary, they seem to have accepted the reform desired, or rather imposed, by the greatest of them all—Elias. The three places that are mentioned by name in the Sacred Page which records the "passing of the Prophet" all belong to the Old Dispensation, and, in so far as we can judge, had been schools or refuges for the earlier prophets, who looked to Samuel as their Father and Guide.

"And it came to pass when the Lord would take up Elias into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elias and Eliseus

were going from Galgal." We are well aware that much discussion has arisen as to the city, or town, or village mentioned in this part of the narrative, nevertheless, it seems not at all against the recorded facts to accept this place as the old city of Galgal, which lay near to Jericho, and on the eastern side. It was a place of more than passing importance in the history of the people of God. It was here the Israelites encamped after their passage of the Jordan; and it was here Josue placed the twelve stones taken from the bed of the river. It was here that the people of God celebrated the Pasch; and it was here, too, that the ceremony of circumcision was performed on those who had been born on the march from Egypt. In the years of Samuel, meetings of the prophetic brethren were held in Galgal. Although the evidence for the smaller and far less significant place is persuasive, because the situation near to the mountains, and, indeed, a part of them, makes the reference clearer. However, all considered, we believe that there was a home for the prophets near to the famous Galgal—even though we may freely admit that the town of the narrative in the Fourth Book of Kings is the place more distant from Jericho. In the reign of Joram, the son of Achab, " the schools of the prophets " had multiplied, and, owing to the prestige of the Prophet Elias, the communities of those who followed his manner of life were fairly numerous.

It is quite evident that the Prophet was on a kind of visitation of the holy places where his followers were established, and where the new mode of life introduced by him was lived in all its rigor. It may have been a farewell visit and his principal mission was to comfort the men who had followed him into the desert and the mountains. Eliseus was, indeed, their Head or Principal, but he never could—at least in the lifetime of Elias—pretend to the unsurpassed influence of the

Prophet who had called him to the religious state. A visit from the great Prophet of God was, then, something to be appreciated, and if they might by any means become aware of the fact that it was the last visit—the farewell appearance of their Father and friend—what must have been their interest in it! It seems from the reading of the narrative that they all suspected that the Prophet was visiting them for the last time—such we must judge from the constant questioning of Eliseus on the part of the prophetic schools in the various places mentioned.

" And Elias said to Eliseus: Stay thou here, because the Lord hath sent me as far as Bethel." The true Founder of the Prophetic Schools was still in harness and still working for the Lord. Not, indeed, in any work connected with kings or princes, but in a work that was of more interest to Israel than the affairs of any king or any prince could ever be. He was now laying, or rather strengthening, the foundation of an institute that should be of transcendant influence in the fate of the people of God, namely, " the Schools of the prophets "—properly so-called—from whose doors should go forth men really called of God; men who, when they spoke, should speak the message of Him Who had called the Hebrew people to be the repositories of the truths which should herald the coming of the Son of Man, the Messias.

A visit to Bethel was in a sense obligatory on the Prophet, because there was founded of old one of the most flourishing of " the Schools of the Prophets." Sacred to so many memories from the time when Jacob poured the holy oil on the stone and called it " the House of God " until the time when the first of the prophets, Samuel, offered sacrifice there, after the destruction of Shiloh, Bethel was a very centre of religious life, which at times had, unfortunately,

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degenerated into a low superstition. It was very natural that Elias should found there one of his schools of the newer prophets to conserve its sacred memories, and very probably because of its situation so near to the entrance to the land of "the chosen people." In places like Bethel, there were ever lurking dangers to the faith of Israel and Juda; hence, it was almost impossible that Elias could have overlooked it as a place in which, or near by which, he should plant one of his bulwarks of the faith. In all this busy neighborhood we know that there were at one time many companies of the "sons of the prophets."

From Bethel the Prophet made his way south towards another place renowned as the home of the prophets—"And Elias said to Eliseus: Stay here, because the Lord hath sent me to Jericho." This latter city had been named "the city of the palms," and, long before "the chosen people" had crossed the Jordan, close by which it stands, was a city of great importance because of its position in relation to the river that served as a kind of protection to all the country that lay west of the Jordan—from the Dead Sea to the Lake Genezareth. Elias was sure to recall to the minds of his followers the prodigy by which the people of God were enabled to pass dry-shod over the river Jordan; no better way could be thought of to keep green the memory of this great event than by establishing there one of his communities. Perhaps it were better still to term it incorporating in the new institute the remnants of the School of the prophets that had been there from the days of Samuel. In Christian times we have in the neighborhood of this city one of the most famous of the Convents of the Middle Ages. It was then known as the Convent of Quarantain, and was situated on the hills that overlook the city of Jericho.

In fact, all this southern part, with its elevations of hills and mountains, was very suitable for communities of men who desired to live apart from the haunts of men, and yet who were accessible to all who should desire their counsel. They were not too distant; hence, they could descend at times (when such was the will of the God of Israel) to thunder the Law and the Traditions into the ears of unwilling kings and disobedient princes and stiff-necked people.

The narrative of the visit of the Prophet to these various places gives more than a passing glimpse of the work that occupied the later years of the Prophet. No one reading this second chapter of the Fourth Book of Kings would dare deny the contention of the early monks that Elias was the Founder of communities that were in the best sense predecessors of those who lived in the eastern and western solitudes during the early years of the Christian Dispensation, and of those, too, who, forced to leave the lands of Israel and Juda by fierce persecution, still cherished the dream that, though translated as to homes and dwellings, they might yet proclaim to the world that they were in truth the sons of Eliseus and Elias by spiritual adoption.

Eliseus knew that the time for the great Prophet's departure was drawing near. How precisely he came by this knowledge we cannot be certain. It may be that the master himself had communicated the tidings to him; and it may be that the God of Israel had given those men, who had left all for His sake and were living in solitude, and prayer, and mortification, in the desert-places, some inkling that they should not overlong enjoy the presence of their fiery, though ever warm-hearted, master, and that, in a brief time, they should be without the guidance of him who had been so much to them all for years. Eliseus, no doubt, had been selected by the God of Israel and Juda, Who had

not thought they were yet able to face the hardships in store for them in the great struggle to keep alive the faith in the hearts of the children of God in the Eastern lands. A divinely-chosen guide was as yet necessary, but, doubtless, a time should come when they themselves could elect, or choose, him who was to be their Head or Principal. Elias was to depart from their midst, but they should still have him who had, indeed, been called by Elias, but who had been, undoubtedly, chosen of God, and that in a very distinct manner.

There was no denying the fact that Eliseus was aware of the approaching departure of Elias, for, again and again, the Prophet had besought his disciple not to follow him. At Galgal, Elias said to Eliseus—"Stay thou here," but the reply of Eliseus was—"As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." And again at Bethel, before he began the journey to Jericho, the master asks the disciple not to follow; still the same answer is vouchsafed—"And as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." Once more the man of God prepares to visit the smaller communities that lived along the banks of the Jordan and, once more, the same request is made. Once more the same answer is given. It was useless to try to avoid the presence of the favorite disciple at the moment of his passing. Eliseus had possessed himself of the secret of the Lord in regard to Elias, and he thought he had the right to all the consolation that could be obtained from the last glimpse of his master.

Nowhere else in the scriptural narrative have we such plain and forcible evidence of the manner of man Elias was as here in the narrative of the second chapter of the Fourth Book of Kings. Like all men of a fiery nature, he had a very warm heart for all his friends. After his lonely

life in the desert of Galaad, and after the stormy times through which he passed during the years of his contest with King Achab, he had retired to the solitude of the mountain, which solitude was cheered occasionally by his conferences with Eliseus, whom he was instructing in the office of Head of " the prophetic schools," and by his instructions to his disciples who were to be brought to a knowledge of how Israel was to be kept in the right path, notwithstanding all the innumerable temptations from without as well as from within. In those years of retirement he had learned to love these men who had given themselves to God, and who were prepared to do so much for Israel. Naturally, Eliseus was the first spiritual child of this new institute, and, as all first-born, was so beloved. But never did he absorb so much the love of Elias that there was not sufficient for all the other spiritual children. As soon as the Lord had revealed to the Prophet that his last days on earth, at least until the second coming, were at hand, he betook himself to a pilgrimage to all the places that he had founded, and to all " the schools of the prophets " that had adopted the new life, thus becoming one with his own institute. His visit was as the last interview of a fond father who is looking for the last time on the children whom he has brought into the world; the children for whom he has labored; the children in whose forms and faces he sees all that the world holds dear for him. It was a visit full of sorrow, and yet a visit not bereft of great consolation. He had his last testament to make. He had yet to pour into their ears his hopes and his fears for the future, to give them of the wisdom that the years had brought to him, and to tell to them the secrets that he had learned in his communications with the God of Israel. As he travelled from place to place, loving eyes watched him. Eliseus was his intimate companion, but

others of the brethren followed afar off, not losing sight of their Father and Founder until he was within the walls of the dwelling of some of the fraternity who, on their part, were expecting him, and who, at his departure, would send along some members of the community to continue the vigilance. It was thus that some fifty of the brethren from Jericho saw the last act in the life of their master with which Eliseus was so interestedly connected—"And fifty men of the sons of the prophets followed them, and stood in sight at a distance." The love of each of the men who had followed in his footsteps was sincere and profound. It was, like his own love for them, founded on the supernatural—on the wish to do and dare all for the God of Israel. It was, in a sense, the only kind of true love, because it was centred on that which is highest and holiest, and it thus participated in the sanctity of the object around which all efforts centred.

The desire of Elias to get away from the presence of his disciple was not founded on the idea of depriving him of any spiritual gift that the Lord might be pleased to vouchsafe to his successor. On the contrary, the man of God prayed for every blessing and grace on Eliseus, well knowing the difficulties of the office to which he had been called. The fact is that the kindly heart of the Prophet feared the parting scene. It is a feeling that is present with many a heart that loves deeply, namely, to avoid a parting scene, especially when it is well understood that the parting will be for years—perhaps for ever. Elias did not know in what manner the Lord had intended him to leave the earth, and, consequently, he feared that the manner of his passing would be too much for Eliseus. On the other hand, Eliseus was quite confident that the manner in which the Lord intended to separate his master from himself and the sons of the prophets had no dread for

him. The one thing that he did feel was the loss of one who had been a pillar of strength to him and who was, after the God of Israel, the dearest friend he had. " I will not leave thee," exclaimed the disciple with sincere accent, which signified that all the Prophet could do would not succeed in persuading him to leave his presence, and so the Chronicler tells us simply—" And the two went on together." Whilst they wended their way in fraternal conversation along the banks of the river they were being watched by anxious eyes, and they knew it.

When the two prophets came to that part of the Jordan where, in the years long gone by, Josue had led the Hebrew hosts across the miraculously-dried-up bed of the river, a wondrous thing comes to pass. As of old, the waters " that came from above stood together upon a heap," whilst the water " beneath ran down and went off," and thus was formed a path across the bed of the river. In the time of Josue it was the entering into the waters by the Priests carrying the ark of the Lord that was the signal of this remarkable occurrence, and now it is nothing less than the cloak of the Prophet—" And Elias took his mantle, and folded it together, and struck the waters : and they were divided hither and thither. And they both passed over on dry ground."

They were now on the other side of the river, and thus they had evaded the curious, though reverent, eyes of the brethren who were still standing, sorrowful, on their own side. The miracle was performed for the passage of the prophets alone, and was not intended for anyone else, even for any of those who held in such reverence both of the prophets. No mortal eyes save those of the successor of the Prophet himself were destined to gaze on a sight that has excited the wonder of men throughout all the ages.

Touched to the very soul by the persistent and undiminished reverential love of his successor, the man of God asks for some gift for his faithful disciple, and a kindly Providence will not deny to the love of the sorrowful follower an adequate—aye, and far more than adequate—return for his fidelity to his chief—" And when they had gone over, Elias said to Eliseus: Ask what thou wilt have me to do for thee, before I be taken away from thee." We could almost guess the nature of the request that Elias would make. He was conscious of the great difficulties which were now to come into his life. Whilst the master was alive he was at hand to counsel and to advise, and his very presence was a guarantee that " the sons of the prophets " were doing as the God of Israel desired. In the absence of the Father and Founder, in the absence of him who was so close to the supernatural, Who would guard the treasure given to " the sons of the prophets "?—Who would direct their steps in the thorny ways they should have to travel?—Who would keep alive the living fire, the dominating zeal, which had hitherto made their lives so sweet and so easy and, apparently, so efficacious? These problems had often been thought of by Eliseus since he became aware of the near approach of the departure of his master. This is why he grew impatient with " the sons of the prophets " at Jericho who asked—" Dost thou know this day the Lord will take away thy master from thee?" No wonder that his sorrow made him forget for the moment his characteristic gentleness, and so he replied—" Hold thy peace. I also know it." Indeed, he did know it, and the very thought of it had caused him sleepless nights and anxious days. Now, however, has come his opportunity, and right willingly does he avail himself of it. That which, hitherto, had made the new institute a success was the spirit of Elias as breathed by the Prophet him-

self into the men who had come to profess the Rule of the " sons of the prophets." It was the spirit alone of Elias that could continue adown the ages the soul of this movement that should be to Israel a guiding star. It was the example of the man of God that alone could carry the new institute to the years of the New Dispensation, when the Messias should have come to earth. The spirit of Elias would obtain grace and strength for men in the far-distant years, and in places far beyond the Jordan, to live as the " sons of the prophets " lived on Carmel and on Quarantain. It was his spirit alone that could continue in other lands and in other regions the life of " the sons of the prophets " as lived in Galgal, and Bethel, and Jericho.

" And Eliseus said : I beseech thee that in me may be thy double spirit. And he answered : Thou hast asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, thou shalt have what thou hast asked, but if thou see me not, thou shalt not have it." Such was the reply given to this seemingly extravagant demand of Eliseus. It appears that the constancy and the fidelity of Eliseus have touched the man of God, and he seems to hunger for the presence of his favorite disciple in the terrible moment that is fast approaching. Elias knows that the hour of his departure is at hand, and the desire for human companionship grows upon him, just as has happened with some of God's greatest friends when they felt the hour of their dissolution coming nigh—a great big desire for a friendly hand to grasp. So Elias, seeing the fidelity of his disciple, is overwhelmed with the desire to have him near at the dread hour of his departure. It is a spiritual gift that he offers to Eliseus; perhaps we might call it, in a reverential spirit, a little bribe which he knows well cannot be rejected, and shall be well understood and well appreciated.

Not a few writers have tried to fathom what the disciple intended by the expression "thy double spirit." It has little interest for us. We know it tells us that it was something that the successor of Elias required to make a success of the mission to which he had been called by God. It is not unlikely that this "double spirit" was the gift of prophecy and of miracles, for these two were very necessary in the prophetic schools. Living in those ages when the powers of the supernatural were so often displayed—indeed, had to be publicly brought before the eyes of men—so that the will of the Lord should be sanctioned as was due, as well as to confound the machinations of those terrible powers that, at times, broke loose and were apt to deceive the children of God, special care had to be taken. To-day, we are often amazed at the length the good God will permit the agencies of evil to go; in those days, before the Son of Man came to the earth, the kingdoms of the world seemed under the power of the devil to a startling degree. When we read of the mighty influence that Baal and Astarthe and the myriad gods had in the lives of even "the chosen people," at times, we need not marvel that the successor of Elias could not imagine any success for the "sons of the prophets" without those gifts that served Elias to defeat the powers with which he had to contend; those gifts that, at times, decided the issue between the God of Israel and the heathen deities, and, as far as the minds of the men of that generation were concerned, were the only means by which the children of Israel and Juda were kept in the ranks of the people of God. We have seen in another chapter the great necessity for the gift of prophecy; in fact, it was to be one of the distinguishing traits of the new institute, just as it had been of the older schools under Samuel. From the king to the peasant, and from the governor to the soldier,

they all looked for that gift in men who claimed to have authority in the spiritual life. Without this gift, the " son of the prophet " should be shorn of all his authority, not to speak of his prestige, in the eyes of all classes of the community. We might go further and say that it was one of the means by which the favorites of heaven were to be recognised. Eliseus knew all this very well, and, anxious as he was for the double gift to be the inheritance of his children, especially when the Founder and Father of them all had passed from their midst, he wished to have this assurance from the lips of him who spoke with the authority of a tried and true friend of the God of Israel.

It was, we believe, a term applied to the portion that fell to the eldest of a family from the patrimonial inheritance, namely, " the double," which, as a matter of fact, really represented a generous portion of the paternal inheritance. Surely, Eliseus had a right to the " double portion " of the inheritance that fell to the members of the new institute, and in the office that now became his by the passing of Elias he had every need of such generous portion. Nevertheless, we feel quite certain that in this last petition to Elias, the new head of the " sons of the prophets " was thinking more of his brethren, more of the institute itself, than of any of his own wants. When we scan the life of Eliseus as revealed in the Sacred Page we find that his life was singularly like to the life of his master, and we may also note that even greater things, more astonishing miracles, seem to have been accomplished by him than had been done by Elias. We cannot forget that even his bones, whilst in the vault of death, vivified the dead body thrown nigh to them. Verily the successor of the Prophet received " the double portion."

" And as they went on, walking and talking together, behold a fiery chariot, and fiery horses parted them

both asunder: and Elias went up by a whirlwind into heaven."

In the Church of the Carmelite Fathers in the city of Cordova, in Spain, one of the master painters of that country, so famous for its artists, has attempted to portray the above event in the life of the Father and Founder of the Monastic Institute. It is easily seen that a master's hand has attempted to express an inexpressible event. It is only when we contemplate attentively this so-called masterpiece that we come to the conclusion that there are events that no human hand is ever able to portray. Only two men have seen the sight that was granted to Eliseus to see on the banks of the Jordan. One of these now feasts his eyes on grander scenes, but is not permitted to give expression to the sentiments that he felt when he was wafted to heaven by the whirlwind. The other, Eliseus, evidently felt as Paul afterwards felt, when a somewhat similar scene was displayed before his mortal eyes—"Eye hath not seen nor ear heard" nor can the heart of man conceive the grandeur of such happenings. We know only of this stupendous event what the Sacred Writer tells us, and it is very meagre, indeed—"And Elias went up by a whirlwind into heaven." It is better not to attempt the impossible, and the Sacred Pen does not attempt it.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE DOUBLE SPIRIT OF THE PROPHET

It was the eventide when the two prophets were walking along the banks of the Jordan. The sun was sinking to rest behind the distant hills that arose, as if by magic, from the golden sands of the desert. Once more the Jordan rolled in seemingly lazy majesty between its verdant tinted banks, as if the God of Israel had never interfered with its onward course; as if a few moments since it had not stayed its flood to let pass the two friends of the Lord. It looked so calm and tranquil, so vast and deep, that the two prophets engaged in profound conversation reckoned not of its hurrying course nor of its powerful, yet silent and majestic, stride to reach the languid, briny waters of the sea called " of the dead." The sun was sinking, but had not yet sunk, behind the mountains that flanked the plains of Moab. Enough of its golden light was still lingering on the undulating earth waves amidst which the two men, still in deep conversation, moved. It seemed that the last rays were kissing with tenderest touch, with almost maiden modesty, the rippling eddies of the Jordan and the ribbed sands of the earth, thus filling the earth and the skies, the heavens above and the world beneath, with that color whose description has defied thusfar the pen of the writer and the brush of the painter.

The conversation of the men who walked in holy converse along the valley of the Ghor was like the scene around them—it was of earth and it was of heaven. The earthly part of their conversation was tinted with

the colors that came from the great White Throne of the God of Israel. Eliseus spoke of the sorrows of the future, when "the sons of the prophets" should no longer have the companionship of their Father and Founder; Elias spoke of the joys of triumph that should come from the work done for the God of Israel, whom he had never mistrusted from the time he ascended Mount Horeb. Eliseus saw the difficulties and the dangers that were awaiting the children of the new institute; Elias saw their triumphs and their joys, which no man could take from them. Eliseus saw how heavy was the yoke that lay upon the necks of the children of prophecy; Elias saw how sweet it was to serve the God of Israel. Eliseus doubted his own powers, his own capacity to rule, his own ability to take up the burden now left to him by his predecessor. Elias told him of mightier things than he himself had ever accomplished; these should be done by his successor. Eliseus spoke of the weary time that should elapse before the Messias would come: Elias told him of the years of plenty, of joy, and of gladness when the "Expected of nations" would come on the earth. In such conversation did the holy men spend the last hours given them together on the earth.

"And as they went on, walking and talking together, behold a fiery chariot, and fiery horses parted them both asunder." He who, according to the legend, had come into the world swathed in bands of living flames, was privileged to leave the earth in clouds of fire. From the lowering sun came a mighty ray. It dashed through the clouds and, for a moment barely, it bathed itself in the purple gleams that were being reflected from the rocky heights and the golden sands. In that moment, however, it caught the color of a living fire. The fierce white light was subdued and changed by the purple tint reflected from, and yet seeming to rest on,

the surrounding scenery. No wonder that, to the startled eyes of the successor of the Prophet, it appeared to him as a whirlwind of fire. It parted the two friends as the chariot rushing headlong to the attack in war-time separates the men who are in its way. Elias is, indeed, parted from his disciple, and, sitting amidst the fast moving waves of fiery clouds, he gently ascends upwards, as if driven by horses in a chariot. No wonder that the magnificent panorama suggested to the mind of the almost blinded, and certainly thoroughly astounded, prophet that his master was being wafted to the region of bliss in the chariot of fire whose horses must of a consequence be also of fire.

The dreaded hour of parting had come, but never had the successor of Elias fashioned to himself such parting. It was soul-stirring, aye, stupefying, in its effect, by the vastness and the immensity and beauty of it. He had seen the golden chariots of Syria rush across the plains of Israel; he had gazed on the silver chariots of the army of " the chosen people " rush to the fray. He recalled that as they drove in mad array it seemed like a whirlwind of flashing, fiery light; perhaps it were better likened to a tumultuous sea of living gold. The Eastern sun threw down its myriad rays on the gold and silver-tinted chariots, on the magnificent trappings of the fast moving steeds, on the burnished armour of the warriors and drivers—who would not see in such a scene a whirlwind of fire terrible and yet magnificent? The mind of the child of Israel accustomed to such sights could not resist the attraction to liken them to the phenomena of nature so frequent, and so imposing, in those Eastern lands. Eliseus at last found his voice, and called out aloud: " My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the driver thereof." They were the words of a man astounded by the present display of heavenly intervention, grieved at the loss of a friend

whose guiding hand had been so much to him from the years when he clothed him as a Carmelite in the field of his father, Saphat. He was aware, even though not to the full extent, of the loss that had come to himself and to the Institute, and above all to the land so beloved by every " son of the prophets "—Israel.

The exclamation that came direct from the troubled heart of the prophet contained truths that dare not be denied, for, indeed, Elias had been " the chariot of Israel " for long years. He had driven that chariot to the attack of the most fierce and the most terrible enemies that Israel could have. He had been the driver, and alone he had guided the machine of war through the ranks of kings and priests and prophets. Above all, he had trained a generation of drivers who should live to continue the fight for the God of Israel and Juda. Terrible as the chariot in war, so had been the Prophet to the enemies of his fatherland! Like the wheels thereof, he had passed over the bodies and crushed the life out of those who had been ranged in the line of battle for the cause of Baal and Astarthe and the gods of the Groves. Like the passing chariot whose horses had got their headway and were madly plunging to the discomfort of the enemy, so had the man of God passed over the fields of Israel and left them strewn with the mangled bodies of the enemies of the God of Israel. Like the driver of the chariot, who directs his arrow at the leaders of the enemies, did Elias direct the thunder-bolts of heaven against the acknowledged leaders of the foes of Israel. Chariot, indeed, wert thou, Oh man of God! Driver thereof, indeed, wert thou! fearless, steady, zealous, and prudent! Until the days when the Messias should come and bring with Him the blessings thusfar innumerable in the fulness of time, no other chariot like to thine should drive from end to end of thy well-beloved Israel! No other driver

should be found who could steer his machine of war through the obstacles and difficulties that lay in the path of the people of God! When the Messias would come, then, indeed, could be found at His side one who spoke and acted with the zeal and fire of Elias. But this was one of the blessings that the Messias was to bring.

The parting of the two friends had come, as all such partings do, before either friend had realised that the last moment is now passed. It did not occur to Eliseus that his master had been separated from him before he had imparted to him the "double spirit"—the gift so ardently desired, the gift so faithfully promised. Even though his eyes were yet full of that glorious sight which no earthly eyes had gazed upon but his own, his heart was moved by a great sorrow—"And he took hold of his own garments, and rent them in two pieces." It was his outward expression of the greatest sorrow that he could experience.

Elias had not forgotten his promise to his successor. Accustomed to live in the regions of fiery zeal, he did not experience such astonishment at the heavenly display at his "passing." He quietly unloosed from his shoulders the cloak that he carried and allowed it to glide down through the clouds of fiery light, and it fell at the feet of the sorrowing Eliseus. When his tired eyes had ceased to follow the ascending course of his master, and when he had dashed aside the tears that had then filled them, he saw lying on the ground the cloak of Elias. At once he understood the significance of it. This was the guarantee of the "double spirit."

In the East, the dying prophet has nothing so valuable to leave to his successor as his cloak, no matter how worn or ragged it may be. The professor who bequeathes to his favorite disciple his mantle has shown

his desire that he who receives his mantle shall be his successor. It is the legacy that is most expressive of love and admiration. It is the testimony of the master to the ability and the honesty of his pupil to continue the cherished traditions of his school. The cloak is generally the sign of fraternity on the part of all the wearers, but the master's cloak is the insignia of office, of authority, of what we might call, and, indeed, have called, the " apostolicity " of the school as a teaching authority. Whatever gifts had been the property of the master were, by the fact of possessing the cloak, distinguishing features of his successor who obtained it.

We have spoken at length about the cloak, or mantle, as the distinguishing garment of the " sons of the prophets." We have said that Elias had this peculiar cloak, and that he intended that all who were of his new institute should wear, when the occasion demanded, this mark of their calling. He himself seems to have worn it on all occasions when he had missions directly coming from the Lord, and which he was to fulfil as a servant of the God of Israel. Doubtless, it did not add to his authority; but the fact that he invariably carried it on his shoulders—at least from the time he was on the Mount of the Lord, Horeb—gives us some idea of the part it played in his life as well as in his work. It was, without doubt, to this cloak that the soldiers referred when they reported to Ochozias that the man whom they met was " a hairy man." We cannot forget that it was the cloak that the Prophet wore when, after the vision, he went " to call " his successor, Eliseus. We do not read of any anointing in the case of Eliseus, but we certainly are informed that the Prophet placed the cloak that he was then wearing on the shoulders of him whom he intended to be his successor. The virtue of the prophetic office seems to have been connected very closely with the

imposition of the " garment " then worn by the man of God. It was of a certainty the placing of the cloak on the shoulders of Eliseus that gave him the authority that afterwards appeared to be one with that of Elias. After the brief ceremony on the fields of Saphat, no other ceremony is reported. Indeed, no other was necessary.

When the two prophets, knowing that they were still under the vigilant gaze of " the sons of the prophets," wished to pass over the Jordan in order that they might be alone in those precious moments so dear to all friends, namely, the last moments, we read—" And Elias took his mantle, and folded it together, and struck the waters: and they were divided hither and thither. And they both passed over on dry ground." We do not know what effect the word of the Prophet might have had on the waters of the river, but we do know that when the miracle was to be worked at this critical time, Elias did not trust to his word, but applied the sign of the prophetic office, and the moment that the cloak touched the running waters they were divided, just as of old they had been divided at the approach of the ark of the Lord. Not only is it significant that the miracle was worked by means of the prophetic garment, but the time at which it occurred is also significant, for anything in connection with the office, or ritual, or habit, of the prophetic institute had a special sanction during those last moments of companionship between the Founder and his immediate successor. In so far as the cloak, or mantle, was the outward sign of the prophetic vocation, it could not escape the younger prophet that the older man, the Head and Principal thusfar of all, had recourse to that which was so important to the " sons of the prophets " to accomplish the miraculous event.

Neither was the example of Elias lost upon his suc-

cessor, for, reverently gathering into his arms the mantle of his Father and Founder, he turned to the waters of the Jordan and, instead of seeking one of the fords by which he could cross over to his followers, he proceeded to re-enact the miracle that Elias had accomplished by means of the mantle a few hours before. It is thus the sacred narrative tells the story of this first miracle of Eliseus—" And going back, he stood upon the bank of the Jordan. And he struck the waters with the mantle of Elias, that had fallen from him, and they were not divided. And again he said: Where is now the God of Elias? And he struck the waters, and they were divided, hither and thither: and Eliseus passed over." The mention of the name of Elias shows at once that the miraculous power was a gift to the prophetic office. " Thou hast asked a hard thing," said the man of God, nevertheless, " if thou see me when I am taken from thee, thou shalt have what thou asked." And thus it was that the " double spirit " of Elias descended on his successor by means of the mantle which was the significant garment of the prophetic schools.

Around the mantle of the prophets not a little discussion has arisen, and quite a number of interesting stories are told as to its material, its form, and its color.

We are within the bounds of prudent reasoning when we surmise that, so long as the " sons of the prophets " kept to the rule and the spirit of Elias, they strictly adhered to the manner of dress that was given to them in the days of Elias and Eliseus. It is not at all improbable that the dress of the Baptist was akin to the garments worn by the " successors of the prophets " on Mount Carmel—" And the same John had his garment of camel's hair and a leathern girdle about his loins: and his meat was locusts and wild honey." That changes must have taken place in the articles of

dress of the men who thought they were the followers of the prophets is not only possible, but very natural—the vicissitudes of fortune and the troublous times through which they have passed make such changes more than possible.

We have already given our opinion that the cloak of the Prophet was made of goat-skin, and not of the skin of the sheep. Our reason for this assertion is the very practical one that the goat was the constant inhabitant of the high places and the mountains, whereas, the sheep were to be found rather in the lower plains. As one writer remarks—"Upon the large fertile plains the sheep are bred in vast flocks, the rich and succulent grass being exactly to their taste: while in the hilly and craggy districts the goats abound, and delight in browsing upon the scanty herbage that grows upon the mountain-side." This makes the question of the color of the mantle a bigger problem than ever, for the varieties of color found in the mountain goat were as varied as those to be found in the dog. The hair of some of the goats was very rough and coarse, consequently, it could not be ever fashioned into anything save into the coarsest of cloaks. But for this very reason we conclude that it was from this class of goat that the "sons of the prophets" obtained the material for their distinguishing garment.

According to the traditions that seem to have some value, the first mantles, or cloaks, of the prophetic brethren were of a white color. We can readily believe this, for the significance of the color in the sacred ritual of the Levites was not lost on the "sons of the prophets," who had made a beginning under the sacred auspices of the Priesthood of Israel. At least, we can very easily assume that the mantle of the "Father," or Principal, of the brethren should be of this color because of the office he fulfilled. Just as the royal

purple would be indicative of the kingly calling, so also the white would very well represent the religious vocation of the chief of the men who were called on to serve God. The conflict, which we are informed took place later on when the mandarins, or the royal officers, found that the monks on Carmel, and, of course, elsewhere, were clad during their solemnities in a mantle of white, and, in all probability, made of the same material as their own, is not at all improbable; for although we could not imagine the officers of the royal household being clad in the rough, rude goat-skin—the material out of which was formed the mantle of the monk of Carmel—nevertheless, we must still remember that there were many different colors in goat-skins. The hair of some species of the goat was of surpassing delicacy and fineness. Such must have been the hair that covered the top of the sacred repository in the Temple—"Thou shalt make also eleven curtains of goats' hair to cover the top of the tabernacle." Such, too, must have been the kind of goats' skins that were presented as valuable gifts to the Temple.

For the mantle of the royal officer, as for the garment of the prophet, the hair was not removed from the skin proper. It was allowed to remain on the skin, because it acted as a preservative against rough usage and the wear and tear of everyday life; hence, the expression "hairy man," as used in reference to the Prophet, can be easily understood, clad as he was in the rough, untanned hide of the mountain goat.

When the monks from Carmel, who proclaimed that they were the disciples of Elias and Eliseus and "the sons of the prophets," came to Europe they wore, not a white mantle, but a parti-colored one. The mantle was seemingly composed of seven different pieces, of which four were white and three black. The monks

brought with them the story that their predecessors on the Holy Mount had been forced to change the color of their mantle by the edict of the civil authorities who were then in possession of the Holy Land, the reason alleged being the similarity between the mantle of the monks and the cloak of the higher officials. The monks, making a virtue of necessity, changed the color and, perhaps, also the material with which until that time it had been made.

For several centuries, then, the mantle of the monk of Carmel was composed of seven distinct pieces. The four white stripes were indicative of the virtues that should adorn the hermit life, and the black or brown stripes were significant of the life of penance and mortification. Each stripe was sown lengthwise and reached from the collar of the mantle to the extreme end. In some of the very old pictures, there are shown mantles wherein the colors are differently distributed, and run, not lengthwise, but in horizontal stripes. When the monks came to reside permanently in the Western regions the colors which composed the habit, or mantle, of the brethren seemed rather bizarre—at least, to the Western mind, not so accustomed to the combinations and variety of colors which pleased the Eastern taste, it so appeared—hence, we find that their dress caused not a little comment, and seemed to have brought on them no small amount of ridicule when they appeared in their mantles. Finding that the color was an impediment to their progress in the West, and that the young people did not care to enrol themseives in an Order so fantastically clothed, the Fathers petitioned the Holy See to be permitted to return to their ancient mantle. Through the Cardinal Titular of San Martini, namely, Gervasius Giancoletus, they obtained the necessary permission to use the white mantle, which they alleged had been the color used by

their predecessors on Mount Carmel before their cruel expulsion by the Mahomedans. White, they added, had been the distinguishing color of " the sons of the prophets," since and after the time of Elias and Eliseus. From the time of the General Chapter of 1287 A.D., the monks of Carmel have always worn the white mantle, though, of course, the material is no longer manufactured from the skin of the mountain goat. It is not even, as the Baptist's cloak, formed from camel's hair.

Another and quite a different explanation is given for the change in the mantle of the prophetic brethren. It is agreed that the mantle of the Father and Founder of the monastic Institute was white in color, but it is added that, when he dropped from the fiery chariot the vehicle of his " double spirit," namely, his mantle, the folds that were concealed (what may be called the infolds) passed through the fire untouched, and, consequently, remained white; but the folds of the garment that were exposed to the flames were singed and blackened by the fire. This, it has been said, was the reason why the prophetic body, after the " passing " of Elias, and even in the days of Eliseus, adopted the parti-colored mantle.

This pious legend seems to give a very plausible explanation of a fact for which, so far, we have no historically-reliable *data*. It is of interest because it has a reference to the mantle of the Prophet, and, as we have said, this mantle seemed to be the vehicle of the " double spirit " of the man of God.

However, as we have already insinuated, it is not of strict obligation to believe that the chariot was of fire, and much less that the horses were of fire. Those who are inclined to accept the words in their material sense can, indeed, do so without doing any violence to the whole awe-inspiring scene. In that case, it is not

impossible that the cloak did suffer in the passage through the material fire. We might mention that with those who accept this latter interpretation of the nature of the chariot and the horses, they can reasonably maintain that the fire not only despoiled the Prophet of his mundane garments, but that it also purified his corporal members from anything that should be repugnant to the region whither he was about to be wafted. So long as the reader keeps to the interpretation accepted by the Holy Fathers, the drama enacted by the side of the Jordan is one of the most magnificent spectacles that we find in sacred history.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE AFTERMATH

The " sons of the prophets " had followed reverently, and at a discreet distance, the two prophets. When they saw what took place at the Jordan they knew at once that it was intended that they should not further continue their surveillance of the Prophet. They had been witnesses to the remarkable scene when the waters divided hither and thither at the touch of the mantle of their Father and Founder. A reverential curiosity still held them to the place, for they knew well that one at least of the prophets should return by the route that both had taken. We can readily recognise the nature of the information that they possessed in regard to the " passing " of the man of God. It must have been merely a kind of hearsay—talk that had aroused in them the expectation that their master, Elias, was so soon to be taken from them. Or, it is just possible that they had judged from the affectionate leave-taking of Elias that he would not see them again in the flesh, and that, consequently, his time had come to part from them. The question which they had asked of Eliseus had been nothing more than an attempt to know the inner feelings and the sure knowledge that he must have possessed, for, they reasoned rightly, he, above all, should know the truth. It must have been the common knowledge of the prophetic body that their Father and Founder should not leave life as the common mortal. When, then, the younger members of the prophetic body asked Eliseus—" Dost thou know that this day the Lord will take away thy master from thee?"—they were merely seeking a confirmation of something they

had learned as a piece of gossip amongst themselves. This much seems fairly certain from the conduct of the young prophets on the return of Eliseus—" And they said to him: Behold, there are with thy servants fifty strong men, that can go and seek thy master: lest perhaps the spirit of the Lord hath taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley." Such words could not be the reasonable conclusions of men who knew what the Lord intended to do with His servant, Elias.

It is, however, these very words used by " the sons of the prophets " at Jericho that reveal to us a peculiarity in the life of Elias which we rarely see in other biblical characters, namely, that the spirit of the Lord at times took him bodily from the place where he was and transferred him elsewhere. This faculty—or shall we call it privilege?—of passing from place to place by supernatural help is hinted at in a previous passage of the Chronicles when Abdias replies to the order of Elias that he should go and inform his master that Elias was there—" And now thou sayest to me: Go and tell thy master: Elias is here. And when I am gone from thee the spirit of the Lord will carry thee into a place that I know not." It seems, then, to have been well known amongst " the sons of the prophets " that Elias could, if he so willed, call upon this great gift, or privilege, given him by the God of Israel. It was quite within reason that the men who had not seen the " passing " of the Prophet, as Eliseus had, should have surmised that, on this occasion also, the Prophet had recourse to this power of using supernatural means to transfer himself to some desired place of rest and solitude. It was well, indeed, for the faith of the future " sons of the prophets " that, then and there, the " passing " of the Father and Founder of the prophetic schools should be, in an indirect manner, challenged.

Subsequent generations of the children of Israel might have doubted the story told by the successor of Elias. In any case, it is a matter for rejoicing that the question as to the "passing" of the Prophet should receive notice at the very time when it was most easy and most convenient to make all necessary inquiries.

It was not unknown to "the sons of the prophets" that the son of Jared had been taken up into heaven, although the inspired Writer leaves us very much in the dark as to the manner in which his "passing" occurred—"And all the days of Henoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And he walked with God, and was seen no more; because God took him." They, likewise, were well aware of the "passing" of Moses—"Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab upon Mount Nebo to the top of Phasga over against Jericho. And Moses the servant of the Lord died there, in the land of Moab, by the commandment of the Lord. And He buried him in the valley of the land of Moab over against Phogor; and no man hath known of his sepulchre until this present day." It was essential to the well-being and the success of the prophetic body to know to which class their Father and Founder belonged—that is to say, whether he was yet in the flesh or had passed through the portals of death. It was of supreme interest to them to know whether or not he who had led them to their present manner of life was yet in the flesh and, as it were, still watching with corporal eyes the children of his choice. To the prestige of "the sons of the prophets" in the days to come it was all-important to know whether the first of the true prophets had been wafted to heaven in a whirlwind of fire, or had passed to a lonely tomb, carved by angel hands on the mountain-side, or laid to rest in a grave digged deep in some secluded valley.

Although to the prophet fresh from the glorious sight

of the "passing" of his Father and friend it seemed like a crime to doubt of the whereabouts of Elias, nevertheless, it could not escape his practical mind what advantage it must be, not only to those of the present, but for the generations to come, that all doubts as to the glorious destiny of the Father and the Founder of the prophetic and monastic schools should be forever laid to rest. At first, he did not seem to like the air of doubt associated with the kindly-proffered words of the "fifty strong men" who volunteered to seek for Elias. This dislike is expressed in the words with which he replies to their petition—"And he said: Do not send." It was as if they were to say that they knew his mind on the matter, and surely they could trust him. The quiet and subdued prohibition expressed in few and simple words seemed to add: "Why seek for him whom in life you knew so well?—surely one who lived as Elias lived could never pass away from the haunts of men as one who had never been to the God of Israel what they all knew Elias to be."

However repugnant the proposition of the young men might be—at least, at first sight—nevertheless, on second thoughts, as they still insisted, the successor of Elias gave way graciously to the proposed search—"But they pressed him, till he consented, and said: Send." Eliseus awaited with the utmost confidence of one who had been an eye-witness to a fact, so when the young men returned back to the Jordan, after having sought in all the neighborhood, he merely said—"Did I not say to you: Do not send." He gave them no lecture on their incredulity, for the net gain to the members of the prophetic schools was worth all that he had suffered by their doubts and all the labors undergone by them.

We may recall that the last act "the sons of the prophets" saw their Father and Founder perform was the dividing of the waters of the Jordan. Now, we may

notice, when the successor of the great Prophet was seen in the distance returning, his master being no longer with him, "the sons of the prophets," who were still straining their eyes for a glance of the prophets, beheld the one returning approach the Jordan, and in the same way as the great Prophet himself had done; so he, Eliseus, stooping down, strikes the water sharply with the mantle of the Prophet. This time they notice a hesitation on the part of the striker, and, then, they behold him vigorously apply the mantle a second time, after he had uttered, what seemed to them in the distance, a prayer. The second stroke had the desired effect. The waters above where the prophet was standing remained still, whilst the waters below him rolled on in their course, thus leaving a dry path for the successor of their first master. It would be difficult to tell the emotions which surged through the young members of the prophetic band when they saw the extraordinary occurrence, so graphically told in the sacred narrative—"And he took up the mantle of Elias, that fell from him: and, going back, he stood upon the bank of the Jordan. And he struck the waters with the mantle of Elias, that had fallen from him, and they were not divided. And he said: Where is now the God of Elias? And he struck the waters, and they were divided hither and thither: and Eliseus passed over." It seemed to them that the younger prophet had taken up the work of the greater and the older man just exactly where he had left off. For years the man of God had spoken of the son of Saphat as his successor, but in the lifetime of the great servant of the God of Israel there was really no means of telling in what Eliseus was more than the other members of the holy brotherhood. Now that the first master is gone from their midst, the younger prophet is doing the work which formerly was allotted to his master alone.

They had all known of his call, and they had seen the predilection of the man of God for the son of Saphat. Now they see him returning with the cloak of the master, and not only returning with it, but performing exactly the same miracles with it that the master had done. What other credentials could " the sons of the prophets " demand?

When we assume that Eliseus, in his new capacity of Father of " the sons of the prophets," then made a visitation of the many schools and convents formerly under the jurisdiction of Elias, in order that he might announce the facts relating to the glorious " passing " of their Founder, we are merely using the Sacred Page to direct us to a matter that, at once, appears not only feasible, but very necessary. We are told that he returned to Jericho, where he performed a miracle for the people of the place, as if to prove to them that he had not only received the mantle of Elias, but that he had also his " double spirit "—particularly that which was so appreciated in those days, the power of working miracles. The request of the inhabitants of the place seemed to have been proposed to him as a proof of his right to succeed in the office and prestige of the great Prophet of Carmel. When the waters had been " healed," so that " there shall be no more in them death or barrenness," we read that " he went up from thence to Bethel." Here, also, a miracle was worked by him to prove that " the sons of the prophets " dare not with impunity be insulted or ridiculed. Then we are told—" And from thence he went to Carmel; and from thence he returned to Samaria." In all these visitations—and, of course, we have not at all the complete narrative of the whole number of places visited—the successor of Elias spoke of the " passing " of the man of God, and also announced his accession as head of the schools which now appeared to number quite a few.

The schools of the prophets seem to have increased in numbers and in prestige, for in the times of the successor of Elias we read quite frequently of them in the sacred narrative. The element that seemed the chief component of the Institute in the time of Samuel must have in the days of Eliseus grown considerably less, namely, the men who tried to combine the two lives, that is to say, the life of the prophet, while yet continuing to live with domestic ties. In the fourth chapter of the Fourth Book of Kings we read—" Now a certain woman of the wives of the prophets cried to Eliseus, saying : Thy servant my husband is dead. Thou knowest that thy servant was one that feared God." It is not, however, improbable that he may have been formerly one of the members of the prophetic body, and, whilst still retaining his love for the brethren, had taken to the life that made domestic ties a necessary consequence. By this we do not intend to convey that all the members of the prophetic colleges and schools were bound by vows, but we do believe that it was impossible to live the life as desired by Elias and, at the same time, be obliged to respond to the demands of domestic life. The example of both Elias and Eliseus is sufficiently strong to make it apparent that the perfect mode of living amongst " the sons of the prophets " was really like to the mode of living afterwards of obligation amongst the early Christian monks.

It is apparent that they lived in communities and were sustained by the efforts of the whole brotherhood in each place—" And Eliseus returned to Galgal. And there was a famine in the land; and the sons of the prophets dwelt before him. And he said to one of his servants : Set on the great pot, and boil pottage for the sons of the prophets." The offerings made to the communities were made in charity for the sustentation of all the members—" And a certain man came from

Baalsalisa bringing to the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley and new corn in his scrip." The number is given fairly accurately for " the sons of the prophets " in Galgal—" And his servant answered him : How much is this that I should set it before a hundred men?" We may conclude that if the community in Galgal were anything like all the other larger convents of " the sons of the prophets," then the number in all Israel and Juda must have been very large, indeed. Naturally, Galgal would not be so large, nor so popular, as the community on Mount Carmel, the favorite home of both Elias and Eliseus. The method of obtaining recruits, and also the manner of instructing them, must be somewhat akin to the ways of the religious Orders of the present time—indeed, of all time. When the prophet Eliseus had refused the gift from the Syrian General who had been cleansed of his leprosy, Giezi, his servant, did not appreciate the generosity and the independence of the Father of " the sons of the prophets," and so he secretly followed Naaman and said—" Well : My master hath sent me to thee, saying : Just now there are come to me from Mount Ephraim, two young men of the sons of the prophets. Give them a talent of silver, and two changes of garment." It is evident that there was a common spirit of charity, and that each community helped the other. Mount Ephraim was, of all places, an excellent location for the life peculiar to the prophetic schools. The painful incident between the servant of Eliseus and Naaman shows that in the ranks of the brethren there, at times, was repeated the old story of men unworthy of their calling; but the story aids us in obtaining an idea of the esteem in which the common life was held amongst these followers of the Prophet—" So now thou hast money and received garments, to buy oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen and men-servants

and maid-servants." Thus exclaimed the prophet; but he took good care to add—"But the leprosy of Naaman shall stick to thee, and to thy seed forever. And he went out from him a leper as white as snow."

The numbers in the days of the successor grew faster than there was accommodation for them—"And the sons of the prophets said to Eliseus: Behold the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us." It seems to have been the work of the prophet to look to the needs of all the communities, and we can reasonably conclude that his care over all was just such as we see to-day in the Superior of religious communities for those committed to his charge.

It would appear that the prophetic schools grew in importance, as well as in numbers, in the days of Eliseus even more than in the lifetime of the Father and Founder of the newer professors of the prophetic body. It may have been the necessity of the time, but it is far more likely that the news of the "passing" of the great Prophet of Fire had awakened in the hearts of the youth of Israel a great desire to make themselves worthy of any "call" that the God of Israel might have for them. It was something to appreciate, namely, they were following in the footsteps of the "chariot of Israel and the driver thereof." There was in such a "calling" an appeal to their patriotism and to the religious character that ever accompanied the child of Israel, no matter what might have been his surroundings.

The manner of life of these "sons of the prophets" has been the subject of much discussion. Of one thing we may be certain—the study of music was never absent from the curriculum of those schools. Even in the time of Samuel we have seen that the major part of the worship of "the sons of the prophets" consisted in some kind of music in honor of the deity worshipped. Indeed, it seems to have been the accompanying of their

songs with the timbrel and the harp and lyre that gave them their title of " prophets "—for that was the name bestowed on them for their public praise of God, no matter what the word prophet has now come to signify. We find in the time of Eliseus that the music formed an integral part of the prophetic religious rites. When the king of Israel had besought an answer from the successor of Elias in regard to the war he was about to wage with the Syrians, he was angry with the king. On account of Josaphat, however, he gave an answer; yet before he could prophesy he demanded—" But now bring me hither a minstrel. And when the minstrel played, the hand of the Lord came upon him and he said : Thus saith the Lord," etc. The minstrel was, in all probability, one of his own disciples, by some of whom he seems always to have been accompanied.

Just as in our own days music is one of the best recognised means to express the praises of God, so also, in those days, the religious rites of the prophets must have been very much aided by music, both vocal and instrumental. Who can tell what the subsequent psalms, and canticles, and lamentations, and prophecies owe to the schools of the prophets, in which, away from the daily distraction of life as lived in the busy world, the youth of Israel learned " to praise " God on instruments and with voice. In those schools or convents they were free from domestic ties, and were thus free to think only of the God of Israel. The glorious numbers in the Sacred Writings, the fulness of thought, the perfection of expression, the intensity of feeling, which made the Hebrew language the fitting vehicle for the messages of the Lord, and for His lessons to mankind, must surely owe something to the schools of men who tried to live as Elias and Eliseus lived—for the God of Israel alone.

Apart from the music which must have been particularly treasured because of its worth to praise

God, or, in other words, to " prophesy," there were also the arts and the sciences which surely formed a part of the education imparted to the neophite who had left all for God.

The calling of " the son of the prophet " was to eradicate from Israel the worship of the false gods against which their Father and Founder had so fiercely waged continuous warfare. No better way could be imagined than to imbue the minds of the youth of Israel with the truth—that is to say, with the Law and the Traditions of " the chosen people." This could not be accomplished unless by coming in contact with the young, and informing their minds. As once the monasteries were the homes of learning and science, as well as of religion, so those schools of " the sons of the prophets " must have developed into homes of learning and religious knowledge.

When the God of Israel wanted ministers, no better subjects to do His will could be found anywhere than in those homes of learning and religious truth, where men, far away from the turmoil of the world, could dedicate themselves to His service and to pursuit of those arts and sciences that could be used as shields to protect the inheritance of " the chosen people."

It was a well-known characteristic of the Hebrew people to have some trade or profession. We may be quite sure that " the sons of the prophets " were no exception to this wise rule. One of the oldest rules that we know of, and made for the monks on Carmel, living, as the author mentions, close by the fountain of Elias, explains that idleness is a very grievous fault, and that when temptation comes it should ever find the monk occupied, because laziness is an invitation to the evil one to enter the soul. The wise admonition is given, namely, that he who labors not has no right to eat. The chapter ends by exhorting all to work in

silence and to eat honest bread. Although this rule is given to Christian monks in the days that followed the coming of the Messias, nevertheless, it could, we feel confident, just as well be a rule for the early followers of Elias and Eliseus; above all, it must have been the great principle for those who had seen the Prophet of Fire and his successor.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE DEATH OF THE PROPHET

The Chronicles of the Fourth Book of Kings do not leave us in any doubt as to the regions to which the Prophet was wafted in the fiery chariot. It is declared—"And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elias into heaven by a whirlwind," etc. From this passage in the Holy Writ we may at once assume that the present abode of the Prophet is heaven. It has been argued with a good deal of reason that where Enoch is, there also is Elias, because the circumstances attending the passing of both seem to be very similar; the end, or purpose, for which one was translated seems to be the same for the other. In the Book of Ecclesiasticus it is precisely stated—"Henoch pleased God and was translated into paradise, that he may give repentance to the nations." The same authority, when treating of Elias, insinuates, rather than declares, that he is in this heaven, the abode of Enoch—"And Elias the prophet stood up, as a fire. . . . . Who art registered in the judgments of times to appease the wrath of the Lord, to reconcile the heart of the father to the son and to restore the tribes of Jacob." The writer of the First Book of Machabees is far more definite, for he asserts—"Elias, while he was full of zeal for the law, was taken up into heaven." Impressive and soul-stirring as is the scene on Thabor when the Son of Man was transfigured and was seen by the Apostles in company of Moses and Elias, our information does not go further than that whatever place he occupied he was deemed worthy to be in the company of the transfigured Saviour of Mankind, also that his condition of living did not unfit him to share in the splendid glory of that heavenly panorama on Thabor. If, however, Moses

had passed through the gates of death on the mount to which he had ascended when his earthly pilgrimage had ended, it adds to the difficulty of ascertaining the exact abode of Elias, because they seemed to be in a kind of celestial equality on the occasion, although Moses is said to have died, and Elias had not thusfar submitted to the universal sentence.

The opening pages of man's history give us a little glimpse of the place called "paradise"—"And the Lord took man and put him into the paradise of pleasure, to dress it and to keep it." This is naturally the first mention we have of a place of exceeding great enjoyment and pleasure and yet intended for the habitation of man. We can reasonably infer that in this paradise there was everything necessary for the sustenance, as well as the enjoyment, of men. We may not wonder, then, if commentators and theologians have identified the abode of Elias, and those who with him await the coming of the last years of the world, as that place—once the habitation of the first man and woman. These chosen spirits had passed through the world's trials and temptations in such a way as to earn the friendship of God, Who, whilst He was reserving them for another and a greater mission, would surely locate them in a place of happiness—at least, a happiness that was of its nature terrestrial.

A difficulty arises from the opinion of the ancients in regard to paradise—that is to say, the habitation of Adam and Eve—for, if the Garden of Eden were in this present world of ours, as we know it, and if the Deluge were universal, it should follow necessarily that the delights of the Garden of Eden should have been destroyed in that universal flood. Thus we could not say with any kind of certainty that it would be a suitable place for those friends of God. Notwithstanding this difficulty, there is a very old tradition that the Garden

of Eden yet exists, although not in its former freshness and glory; it is still the most pleasant place on earth, and quite suitable for the home of those who remain still in the flesh awaiting the approach of the last day of the world.

We need not delay to recall at length that the idea of the ancients in regard to the world and its component parts is very different to the present-day concept of the world, with its myriad stars and constellations, and, mayhap, other worlds of vaster and greater importance than our orb, which seems to be only a speck in the great universe. This difference in opinions need not disconcert us, for, waiving the question of location, we may assume that the nature of the place must correspond to the lives of those who are the friends of God and who have already fought the good fight, and who, it is commonly believed, are still in flesh and must come once more to our earth and live as men amongst men.

It is generally agreed amongst theologians that it was not the heaven of the angels and the saints, who have been confirmed in glory, to which Elias was wafted in the fiery chariot. The God of Israel, when He would show Himself to the Leader of the people, reminded him that He could not show Himself in all His glory, for " no man could gaze upon Him and live "; hence, the vision was to be in that proportion which man could, without suffering penalty, gaze upon. Many cogent reasons are given why man in the possession of his human faculties, and enjoying the use of them, could not gaze upon the Home of God and His Saints; hence, the prevalent opinion is that Elias is in some place inferior to this " First Heaven," as it is called. Saint Paul, in one of his ecstacies, was wafted to regions, about the beauties of which he speaks in very mystic, though very impressive, language. The impression

which was made upon him was so great and so wonderful that he tells us " eye hath not seen nor ear heard " the glory and the joy that God has prepared for His elect. We could easily suppose such a place for those privileged spirits who await the final call of the Lord. If Paul was privileged to gaze upon the glories of the place, we cannot be deemed unreasonable if we attribute the same privilege to Enoch and to Elias; especially as Paul was still clothed in the flesh, as Enoch and Elias are, according to our traditions.

There can be no quarrel with those who would have these holy men enjoying the company of the angels and saints, so long as they do not assert that they are in the same heavenly abode. We read that it was privileged to our First Parents to hear the voice of God—" And when they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in paradise at the afternoon air, Adam and his wife hid themselves from the face of the Lord." This intimate expression of friendship on the part of the Lord was given to our First Parents whilst yet clothed in the flesh; hence, the lesser privilege cannot be reasonably denied to those who had already proved their fidelity to the Lord God.

Unfortunately, when we come to discuss questions of this kind we always apply to them the language of our daily life, that is to say, of ordinary life on earth. Consequently, it may help to satisfy our readers if we say—they are happy and all their wants are supplied by a benign Creator. These wants are not the wants that trouble us on this earth, for we see how Elias was enabled to travel for forty days and forty nights without any help from external sources save what he received from the bread that the angel had given him. The question of raiment and all such other topics are of interest to those only who too closely identify the two states of life; about the one of which we know nothing

absolutely, and if we speak of it in the terms of the other, it is not at all satisfactory, but misleading.

We have elsewhere referred to the coming of Elias during the last days of the world, for which purpose God keeps him in the paradise of which we have just now spoken. This tradition was very popular in the days when our Divine Lord came on earth. If we remember that the disciples asked the Master about " the second coming " of the Prophet, and He answered as if to indicate that He, too, accepted this belief—" And His disciples asked Him, saying: Why then do the scribes say that Elias shall come first? But He answering said to them: Elias indeed shall come and restore all things." What He added did not deny, in any manner, the tradition evidently accepted by all—" But I say to you that Elias is already come: and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they had a mind." The disciples said amongst themselves in regard to this last remark of our Lord—" And the disciples understood He had spoken to them of John the Baptist." Already the angel that appeared to Zachary had likened his son-to-be-born to the great Prophet—" And he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias; that he may turn the hearts of the fathers unto the children and the incredulous to the wisdom of the just, to prepare unto the Lord a perfect people."

The prophet Malachy, who, in point of time, comes a little more than midway between the period of the two prophets, Elias and Eliseus, and the time of our Lord's coming on earth, shows us that this tradition was still existing in his days—" Behold I will send you Elias the prophet, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers lest I come and strike the earth." Not only

is it mentioned in this prophecy that the Prophet will come, but there is clearly indicated the nature of his mission. Through all the centuries this tradition must have been very clearly before the minds of the people. But as the fulness of time approached and that peculiar uneasiness that preceded the coming of the Messias grew more apparent, it was to be expected that the tradition gained very much in prestige and became more generally known to every class, and to that class particularly, namely, those who had a deep conviction of the nearness of the great event that was to regenerate Israel.

The first Christians, then, succeeded to the tradition of Elias, and thus it became a very distinct feature in the traditions of the Christians. Mention is made of it in the Dialogue of Justin with Tryphon. The Talmud, too, refers to it, as also the Midraschim. Since the beginnings of Christianity the Rabbis have not neglected to preach the tradition, which is still to be found in the teachings of the masters in Israel. The companion, or rather companions, of the great Prophet are not always the same. We find at times that he is alone; at other times he is accompanied by Enoch, and then, again, he has the aid of Moses, and some venture to add Jeremias the prophet. When the days of the Messias on earth had passed, some of the early Christians looked for the coming of Elias in a thousand years, and it was thus that the theme of his coming occupied many of the writers, and even the Rabbinical writers, in the Middle Ages. A more interesting problem has presented itself to the mind of the scholars who find pleasure in those obscure interpretations, namely, the time of his sojourn when he comes for the second time.

What has been declared to be the prophetic attempt to give a passing description of the events that shall herald the last times is to be found in the eleventh

chapter of the Apocalypse, and, as our tradition, relying on the Sacred Texts, assures us, Elias shall play an important part in that dread drama, so this description cannot fail to be of interest to us who have thusfar spoken of the Prophet. The part of the chapter which is of greatest interest is—" And the holy city they shall tread under foot, two and forty months. And I will give unto My two witnesses : and they shall prophesy, a thousand two hundred sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks that stand before the Lord of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire will come out of their mouths and shall devour their enemies. And if any man shall hurt them, in this manner must he be slain. These have power to shut heaven, that it may not rain in the days of their prophecy, and they shall have power over waters, to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they will. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the abyss shall make war on them, and shall overcome them and kill them. And their bodies shall lie in the streets of the great city which is called spiritually Sodom and Egypt : where their Lord also was crucified. And they of the tribes and peoples and tongues and nations shall see their bodies for three days and a half : and they shall not suffer their bodies to be laid in the sepulchres. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them and make merry : and shall send gifts one to another, because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt upon the earth. And after three days and a half, the spirit of life from God entered them. And they stood upon their feet : and great fear fell upon them that saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying to them : Come up hither. And they went up to heaven in a cloud : and their enemies saw them. And at that hour there

was made a great earthquake : and the tenth part of the city fell. And there were slain in the earthquake, names of men, seven thousand : and the rest were cast into a fear and gave glory to the God of heaven."

Saint Augustine is of opinion that Elias, coming at the end of the world, has then to complete his mission, namely, to call to the fold of Christ the Hebrew people. At his first appearance in life his fiery soul was bent on the preparation of " the chosen people " for the coming of the Messias. At his " second advent " his office shall be to call all the children of Israel into the ranks of the followers of the Messias. In such way his work shall see fruition. He will so explain the Law and the Prophets and the Traditions of Israel that the Hebrew people throughout the world cannot resist the grace so often rejected, but finally to be accepted. Undoubtedly, we meet in the New Testament the expression—" Elias will come and restore all things " ; hence, by the conversion of the Jewish people the restoration shall be complete.

Many commentators tell us that the two " olive trees " mentioned in the above extract from the Apocalypse, as also the two " candlesticks," are titles given to Elias and his companion Enoch to indicate their respective qualities as missionaries to the God of Israel. The term of years given to the reign of evil over the Holy City and which seems to be, by a peculiar coincidence, the same space as was allotted to the mission of the two prophets, is exactly the period of time for which the drought afflicted Israel in the days of Elias. The three years and a half, or, as given later, " a thousand two hundred sixty days," is, no doubt, a number that has, perhaps, other significations than that which appears in the ordinary acceptation of the words; nevertheless, we do not exclude the probability that the period corresponding to the exact number of years mentioned

may be intended. If so, the mission of Elias will be brief, but of as long duration as his great struggle with Achab.

The purpose of the coming of Elias in those last days is—in so far as one may surmise—that the powers of evil, in the person of Antichrist, shall seem to have triumphed over all the efforts of the Messias to bring the sons of men, and particularly the Hebrew people, to the kingdom of His Father. So complete shall the triumph of Antichrist be that he will accomplish the death of the two Precursors of " the Second Coming " of the Son of Man; and, as we see in the Apocalypse, there shall be rejoicing amongst the children of the world, who will make of the death of these two friends of God a matter of merry-making. As of old, Achab demanded why the Prophet should come to disturb Israel, so the people of the world will consider those missionaries as mere disturbers of the peace which they have enjoyed in their sins; or, to put it more correctly, the peace that they imagined they could enjoy in their sins. A wonderful miracle then shall take place, for the Lord, in His indignation at the base ingratitude of men, will recall to life the two prophets, and so confound their enemies.

The years of Elias, when he comes again into the haunts of men, shall be a period full of activity, and of zeal, and of conquest. And, as in Israel in the years of Achab, he appeared here and there, and, in fact, seemed to have travelled the whole of the land of " the chosen people," so it is not at all unlikely that he will travel a goodly portion of the earth's surface. It is even more likely that he shall have many helpers in this mission; for surely, in the centuries that have followed the coming of the Messias, there will be found " seven thousand who have never bent their knees to Baal," aye, and probably far more than " seven thousand,"

for the fruits of the coming of the Son of Man should be greater far than anything that preceded it. The fact that the army of the Lord shall be defeated for the time, and that victory shall rest for a few years with the followers and friends of Antichrist, does not argue that the number of the faithful shall be few. The terrible persecutions that are to be employed to break the courage of the followers of Christ are evidence of the warm faith and the energy of those who shall have remained true to God and His Church.

The city spoken of in the Apocalypse, wherein the two prophets are to be put to death, and wherein their bodies are to lie exposed for three and a half days, is declared by some authorities of importance to be the Holy City in which Christ was put to death. It is even suggested that their death shall be by crucifixion, because, in this way, they will be likened to their Master, not only in the manner of the death given them, but also in the place chosen for that death. These opinions have been founded on the phrase above quoted in the extract from the Apocalypse—"where their Lord also was crucified." There would seem to be a difficulty in reconciling the city of Jerusalem, or, indeed, any one city, with the universality of the crowd that are to see the bodies of the slain men of God, for the text is—"And they of the tribes and the peoples and tongues and nations shall see their bodies for three days and a half." If the war between Antichrist and the followers of the Messias shall have been of a fairly long duration, and if the triumph of the chief opponent of the Lord were to be really a great triumph, it might not at all be unlikely that to celebrate the triumph the city of Jerusalem should be selected, and, then, the city for the occasion would be full of representatives from the many peoples of the earth, who should represent the many nations and tongues. It might be

recalled that of the First Pentecost Day the Scriptures tell us that in Jerusalem were "Parthians and Medes and Elamites and inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappodocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the Parts of Libya about Cyrene and strangers of Rome. Jews also and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians." These are spoken of in the preceding verses as "of every nation under heaven." It may not be far-fetched to say that in the days of Antichrist similar elements shall represent "tribes and peoples and nations."

That the bodies of the two servants of God should be exposed to the public gaze, and on the open streets of the great and crowded city, may be attributed to the hate with which the enemies of God and His Church are to be inspired; but there may be also another reason, namely, that it shall be an occasion which the good God turns to the advantage of His Church and to the greater glory of His slain servants. When the crowd had seen the mangled bodies of Elias and his companion, and when for three days those bodies were being conveyed from place to place in the city, all should thus come to a knowledge of their certain death. Not only in Jerusalem might this knowledge sink into the minds of the people, but it is sure to penetrate to the outside world, so long are the bodies destined to remain unburied. It is thus that the Lord shall have prepared for His two servants a far more glorious reward than if they were to be treated with the decency that is generally meted out to the bodies of those who have died for a cause. It was thus that Elias became known to the world as crowned with the triple diadem of Doctor, Virgin and Martyr. Not one of his titles could be denied to him, for the tribes and the peoples and the nations shall see and hear and know, since the revelation is assuredly the word of God.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE SECOND "PASSING" OF THE PROPHET

The vision, as related in the Apocalypse, is intensely interesting, and it does not shut out from us what is to be the end of the two antagonists of Antichrist. It tells us of the triumph of the powers of evil and the seemingly complete discomfiture of the friends of God. When the scene opens on their dead bodies in the public streets of a city filled with the representatives of the whole world, we may well be filled with dark despair. Worldly triumphs are usually all of the same order; they rush in with all the pomp and ceremony possible, and for the moment seem to be destined for a long and glorious reign, but the old proverb—that "the mills of God" grind slowly, though they leave nothing untouched for those who have the patience to wait—is constantly making its truth more apparent. The signs that seemed to confirm the lasting triumph of Antichrist were the heralds of disaster and defeat to him and his. It is thus the vision tells the remaining part of the drama of the future—"And after three days and a half, the spirit of life from God entered into them. And they stood upon their feet: and great fear fell upon them that saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying to them: Come up hither. And they went up to heaven in a cloud: and their enemies saw them."

Human eyes had gazed upon the person of the Prophet as he was swept into the heavens by the whirlwind, which had assumed the form of a chariot drawn

by horses, that came to separate him from his beloved disciple on the plains of Moab, close by the Jordan. Once more, human eyes had been privileged to see him in the company of the transfigured Son of Man, when the light of heaven encircled him in that glorious company on Thabor. The inspired narrator has endeavored to tell us somewhat of the glory that rested on him on each occasion; but on this, the third time, the description is very meagre, indeed. Since the two former events had occurred, something happened to change our concepts of those celestial " passings." Hence, the prophetic account of the second " passing " of Elias seems halting.

When the time had come for the Son of God to ascend to His heavenly Father, it is thus that the writer of the Acts of the Apostles describes the event—" And when He had said these words while they looked on, He was raised up : and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they were beholding Him going up to heaven, behold two men stood by them in white garments, who also said : Ye men of Galilee, why stand you looking up to heaven? This Jesus Who is taken up from you into heaven shall so come as you have seen Him going into heaven." This description is very brief, and not at all satisfying; but we are content, because we recognise that no human pen could describe the infinite glory of this Ascension. Painters have tried to give us an idea of it, and our traditions have represented in vivid word-pictures the return of the Son of Man, as Judge, on the Last Judgment; we know that we have gained a passing idea of this event, but we are perfectly sure that we have not, and perhaps never can have, an adequate idea of the Ascension of the Messias when His message had been delivered. Since that event, yet another event has happened, and one that might be called a kind of complementary of

the first, one that has occupied the minds of the best and the holiest children of the Church, namely, what has been called the " Assumption of the Blessed Virgin." Men have refused to believe that the tabernacle of the Lord, the font from which sprang His human nature, could be, and hence should pass from us, as the body of a mere creature who had never been gifted with such privileges. Tradition tells us of the " passing," or, as some would prefer to call it, " the sleep of the Virgin," that angel messengers came from heaven and, amidst celestial strains, transported the body of God's Mother to Her place in the Court of heaven.

It is only to be expected that two such " passings " had given, not only to the writer of the Apocalypse, but to all the children of the Church, another and a far more exalted concept of what such events mean, and with what celestial wonders they must be accompanied. This may be the reason why we have such a brief account of an event that shall have caused a great sensation amongst the peoples of the earth who are to assemble in the Holy City for quite a different purpose to that at which they will be forced to assist when the two prophets of God shall have thrown down their challenge to the followers of Antichrist. When the bodies of Elias and his companion martyr again are animated by their immortal souls, a mighty fear shall thrill the peoples gathered into the Holy City. It will recall the scene in the hall of Balthasar, when the drunken guests saw the writing on the wall—their mirth was changed into craven fear and their merry-making ended in miserable foreboding of the things to come upon them. In the presence of the manifestation made by the one true God they forgot all about the glories of their gods of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of iron, and of wood, and of stone—they drank no more

to them, nor did they praise them any more. So shall it be with " the peoples, the tribes and tongues and nations " of the great city. The vivid word-picture of the prophetical Evangelist conveys so much to us—" and great fear fell upon them that saw them." To behold once more those bodies that had lain " for three and a half days " under the burning rays of the Eastern sun—surely they must have been in an advanced state of decomposition! How shall they ever contemplate an earthly renewal for those masses of corruption? The spiritual torments inflicted by the preaching of those messengers of God!—how could anyone dream that they should ever be again after the vision of their helplessness in the streets of the city?

Not only shall the peoples and the tribes see the two martyrs arise to a new earthly existence, but they shall hear a voice from heaven, and they shall be well aware whence comes the voice, saying—" Come up hither." In the hearing of them all, shall the two servants of God be invited to the heavenly mansions.

The words that describe the second passing of the Prophet are very simple, indeed—" and they went up to heaven in a cloud." The scene must have been thrilling to the beholders, for it is expressly mentioned—" and their enemies saw them." The recompense must be in proportion to the loss; the victory must bear some proportion to the defeat. The glory of that passing must be such as to make all of them who had gazed upon the indignities inflicted on the messengers of the Lord forget the lowliness of human nature and think only of its affinity to the celestial spirits. Grand and imposing as the first " passing " of the Prophet had been, yet because of the circumstances we must picture the " second passing " a scene far more inspiring, far more solemn, surrounded with far greater evidences of the heavenly satisfaction in

the life of the Prophet—then to be ended in time and also to be presently begun in eternity. The words used to describe the first " passing " are worthy of note, as also those pertaining to the second " passing." Of the first it is written the Prophet " was caught up into heaven," but in the second the writer uses a phrase that would lead us to believe that he will ascend on that second " passing " as if it were his right to do so—" he went up."

We need not, here, make any digression to discuss whether it was the same body that was animated by the spirit of the Prophet on each occasion. One truth comes home to us—that the years of toil in the Master's service will surely give rights to degrees of celestial happiness not earned by the Prophet until those last days; and no one can doubt that the martyrdom in the great city endeared to the God of Israel the Prophet of Carmel in an especial manner. The cup of cold water does not go without its reward : what, then, shall be the reward of Elias for the toils and the labors and the death that crowned those last days?

We have assumed in this chapter that the two witnesses of whom the Evangelist speaks in his vision are Elias and his companion. It is only just and fair to our readers to say that all biblical writers are not agreed on this explanation of the passage from the Apocalypse, although very few are against the fact of a " second coming," and consequently of a " second passing," of the Prophet.

Some writers maintain that the two witnesses who are to herald the end of all time are representatives of the lay and the clerical elements in the Church, and that thus, in the midst of all the persecution, there shall be found faithful souls true to the Church until the very end. Other writers would give those witnesses names that connect them with other personages, who

are, however, always preachers of the Word—a special preference being for those who have already given their lives for the Faith of Christ. All these writers should find it difficult to produce characteristics in the life of those whom they have suggested which should as aptly apply to them as those characteristics apply to Elias. Let us recall that " if any man hurt them fire shall come out of their mouths, and shall devour their enemies." We have here a very pointed reference to the facts related in the life of Elias in the Book of Kings. To whom else could the words so aptly apply—" Those have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy." One can see easily the reference to the cloak of the Prophet in " they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." Need we recall that the period of the plague which struck the land of Israel in the days of Achab was of an equal length to the foregoing time of the mission of the two witnesses. The final fact related of these men most certainly recalls the first " passing " of Elias and Enoch. We make no apology for asserting that the second " passing " of the Prophet is narrated in the vision of the Evangelist at Patmos.

The punishment inflicted on the enemies of the Prophet on the Mount of Carmel, the chastisement visited on " the captains and their fifties " in the days of Ochozias, seemed to be merely a faint type of the things that were to come to the enemies of the Prophet in the later times, for we read—" And at the same hour," that is to say, following on the triumph of the witnesses, " there was made a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell : and there were slain in the earthquake names of men seven thousand : and the rest were cast into a great fear." This visitation shall have happier results than the types referred to. The Sacred Scribe adds to his vision—" and they gave glory

to the God of heaven," that is to say, those who were spared the terrible earthquake. Perhaps it was thus that the words of the prophet Malachy were to be realised that " he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE FOLLOWERS OF THE PROPHET OF CARMEL

The attentive reader of the Books of the Kings cannot doubt for a moment that the God of Israel intended the prophet Elias to be the founder of a dynasty of men who should carry on his principles and follow his mode of life. He was commanded by the Lord to seek out Eliseus and to anoint him, and it is particularly mentioned that Eliseus is to be the successor to the Prophet. The dignity to which Eliseus is called admits of no misunderstanding, for the Sacred Writer says—"to be prophet in thy room"—which can have no other meaning than that he is to carry on the mission committed to the elder Prophet, and with all his powers and with all his prestige. We have already noted the leave-taking of the newly-appointed prophet, which must mean a total severance from all family ties and no return back to his former life. At the solemn moment of parting from his master, Eliseus receives the cloak which, as we have seen, was the real token of the power and spirit of the master. It was not, surely, for a mere passing show that this momentous ceremony had taken place. Indeed, in the light of what we know even from the Holy Writ, it was a very significant ceremony, especially to those of "the sons of the prophets" who saw the disciple strike the waters of the Jordan with that precious inheritance. On beholding the action of the favorite disciple of Elias, the onlookers said—"The spirit of Elias hath rested upon Eliseus." Then it was that they made their submission to him

as the head of their fraternity—" And coming to meet him, they worshipped him, falling to the ground." Not only did they perform this act of obeisance, but, before they proceed to do the work they were anxious to begin, they ask his permission to do so, namely, to see if the Prophet might not be in the neighborhood—" And they pressed him until he consented."

Eliseus proceeded to the work of keeping the spirit of the Prophet alive in the new institute which, from all we can learn, had in a brief period already assumed the proportions which we see to-day in many religious communities.

Various places were blessed with the presence of the " sons of the prophets," but Carmel seems to be the Alma Mater of the new institute. It was on that holy Mount that the great Prophet passed the last years of his life. It was on that same mountain that his successor fixed his dwelling. When the Sunamitess, in her great grief, was anxious to speak with the successor of Elias, she directed her steps to Carmel, expecting to find him there, as if it were the well-known abode of the prophet—" And she saddled an ass, and commanded her servant : Drive, and make haste, make no stay in going. And do that which I bid thee. So she went forward, and came to the man of God in Mount Carmel."

The presence of Eliseus and the " sons of the prophets " on the Holy Mount has given it a new importance, for evidently the people go there at certain intervals for religious worship. So much appears from the question of the husband of the Sunamitess, namely—" And he said to her : Why dost thou go to him? To-day is neither new moon nor sabbath." From this question we may easily infer that the prophets on Mount Carmel had religious ceremonies attended by the people on certain feasts. The fact that women were

allowed to participate in the functions is an indication of a new spirit in the observances of the men who lived there under the jurisdiction of Eliseus. To seek spiritual comfort from the men who had dedicated their lives to the God of Israel was evidently the prevailing idea in those visits, for we see that " when she came to the man of God to the mount, she caught hold of his feet : and Giezi came to remove her. And the man of God said : Let her alone, for her soul is in anguish, and the Lord hath hid it from me." We may not doubt that the prophets on Carmel had taken upon themselves the duty of comforting the afflicted, and, in so far as possible, healing their wounds—both corporal and spiritual.

Carmel was, indeed, the chief place of meeting for " the sons of the prophets," but, as we have hitherto remarked, there were other centres of importance to the new brotherhood. Scarcely had Eliseus entered into his high office when we find it written of him—" And Eliseus returned to Galgal, and there was a famine in the land, and the sons of the prophets dwelt before him." Once more we are brought into the presence of an assembly like to that on Carmel, and here, too, the recognised head is the successor of Elias.

These assemblies of men seem to have a common life, and they all eat from the same table, and their wants are supplied from the same source, just as, to-day, we see the members of all religious communities. It is related that he who had the care of all said—" Set on the great pot, and boil pottage for the sons of the prophets "—and then follows the narrative which shows they were all partakers of the same meal—" And one went out into the field to gather wild herbs : and he found something like a wild vine, and gathered of it wild gourds of the field, and filled his mantle, and coming back he shred them into the pot of pottage, for he knew

not what it was. And they poured out for the companions to eat: and when they had tasted of the pottage they cried out, saying: Death is in the pot, O man of God. And they could not eat thereof." It thus appears that those communities lived by their own toil, aided by the charity of special patrons or friends. The poor and needy were not forgotten by them; in fact, we can perceive amongst them the beginnings of that lavish charity for which the Christian monasteries have been noted. We have it recorded in the Sacred Page—" And a certain man came from Baalsalisa bringing to the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and new corn in his script." This was evidently intended as an offering to the brethren; but at once the man of God, namely, Eliseus, said to the donor—" Give to the people that they may eat," for there was a famine in the place. The miracle that followed was a reward for the charity displayed by the head of the prophetic family then residing at Galgal.

Charity was accepted; but, for the works of mercy dispensed through the ministry of the brethren, no recompense, which seemed to be a payment, was received. This much appears from the incident which occurred when the Syrian General, Naaman, was cleansed of his leprosy. The transaction in which the servant of the prophet took part had all the appearance of simony, and was accordingly punished by the Lord at the word of His prophet. In this story there is narrated, incidentally, a fact that gives a very clear idea of the relation that existed between the several communities—" Giezi said: Well: my master hath sent me to thee, saying: Just now there are come to me from Mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them a talent of silver, and two changes of garments." It is very evident that there was a real link between the different communities, and that

the rule of the successor of Elias is recognised in the various so-called monasteries.

Whether it was the zeal of the new "Father of the sons of the prophets," or, perhaps, the fame of the life and the recent "passing" of the "Founder of the prophetic school," we cannot at this distant point of time give any real satisfactory judgment; nevertheless, the fact is recorded that in the few years after Eliseus took up the government of the prophetic bands, there was a wonderful increase in the numbers of those called to be "sons of the prophets." On his visitation to one of the communities the man of God was told that more accommodation must be made for the candidates coming to join their ranks—"And the sons of the prophets said to Eliseus: Behold the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us. Let us go as far as the Jordan and take out of the wood every man a piece of timber, that we may build us there a place to dwell in. And he said: Go."

Tradition has drawn a great distinction between the characters of Elias and Eliseus: the one great, and zealous, and in the very intensity of his zeal and in the very greatness of his nature almost repellant—at least, he is so superior to the common mortal that friendship in its ordinary guise cannot be imagined, so aloof do men of his kind seem. The other seems quite human, and almost on a level with the common humanity, even though he does wonderful things and is full of the zeal of his master: he would appear, indeed, to be a typical religious Superior, who, whilst dwelling in the higher places, can gently and sweetly come down to the level of the natures not so gifted. When the brethren were going forth to seek the timber for their new home they asked Eliseus to accompany them, as if his very presence were a help, as well as a protection, to them—"And one of them said: But come thou also

with thy servants. He answered: I will come." The man of God went with them, as if his chief pleasure were to be in the midst of his brethren.

There is no reason for doubting the continuity of this new dynasty of spiritual men until the Advent of the Messias, for Whose coming they would seem to have been specially instituted. Whether we consider the years that preceded the Captivity or the years that followed, the need for them was ever increasing. As the long-looked-for time approached, the difficulties for the people in their spiritual life—both internal difficulties and external ones—grew to almost insupportable magnitude and severity. Michaeus, who was a contemporary of Isaias, writes of those men who were yet on the Holy Mount—he foresaw the terrible times of the Captivity, but he seems to see also the strength to be given to Israel in the years that should follow the terrible time by those "sons of the prophets" on Carmel and elsewhere—"The land shall be made desolate, because of the inhabitants thereof, and for the fruits of their devices. Feed Thy people with the rod, the flock of Thy inheritance, them that dwell alone in the forest in the midst of Carmel." His prayer seems to have been answered, for he adds—"they shall feed in Basan and Galaad according to the days of old."

We know that the institution of the Nazarites remained amongst the people of God until the days of the Messias. The vows of the new school of prophets must have been akin to their vows, even though in some way they may have been more severe and binding. We do not, however, maintain that every Nazarite was a "son of the prophets," and still less would we hold that every "son of the prophets" was a Nazarite, in the strict sense of the word. There seems to be little doubt that Elias was a Nazarite, either of his own free will or as an offering of his parents, who seemed,

according to the Israelitic law, to have the right of so dedicating their children. Samuel was most assuredly a Nazarite—being the offering of his mother, to whom he had been given as a gift from the God of Israel.

A passing view of the obligations of the Nazarite will give us an insight to the general tone of the life of the "sons of the prophets." From the fact that hermit life was more or less of obligation to the latter, their vows must accordingly be somewhat different in their binding power and in their sanction. The Nazarite was so called from the fact that he was separated in a way from others and devoted to the Lord. The separation was twofold: firstly, in so far as he was holy to the Lord; and, secondly, in the fact that he could not drink wine, or any product of the vine—"When a man or woman shall make a vow to be sanctified, and will consecrate themselves to the Lord: They shall abstain from wine, and from everything that may make a man drunk. They shall not drink vinegar of wine, or of any other drink, nor anything that is pressed out of grapes: nor shall they eat grapes either fresh or dried. All the time of his separation no razor shall pass over his head until the day be fulfilled of his consecration to the Lord. He shall be holy and shall let the hair of his head grow." There was, however, no rule prescribed by the Law to regulate the length of the Nazarite's vow. It would be determined by himself, unless, like Samson or John the Baptist, his parents had consecrated him for all his days. Not so with the "son of the prophets," for his religious life was an obstacle to his ever going back into the society of his kind and taking up a mundane life.

Authorities, whose claims to be considered as historians are not to be despised, have found in the Rechabites, of whom the prophet Jeremias speaks, kindred souls to the "sons of the prophets." It is

thus the prophet Jeremias writes of those supposed followers of the great Carmelite, and it must be confessed the likeness in life and manner of acting affords every reason for the identification of the Rechabites and the " sons of the prophets "; he is condemning the disobedience of the people of God, and exclaims—" Go to the house of the Rechabites: and speak to them, and bring them into the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers of the treasures and thou shalt give them wine to drink. And I took Jezonias the son of Jeremias the son of Habsanias, and his brethren, and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites. And I brought them into the house of the Lord, to the treasure-house of the sons of Hanan, the son of Jegedellias the man of God, which was by the treasure-house of the princes above the treasure of Maasias the son of Sellum, who was keeper of the entry. And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine and cups: and I said to them: Drink ye wine. And they answered: We will not drink wine: because Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying: You shall drink no wine, neither you nor your children for ever: Neither shall ye build houses, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyards, nor have any: but you shall dwell in tents all your days, that you may live many days upon the face of the earth in which you are strangers." We may not doubt that there is a certain amount of mystic threatening in the passage of the prophet, and it may be somewhat figurative; nevertheless, it comes to this in substance, that there was a well-defined class amongst the people of God who seemed to be strangers in their own land; who lived lives of abstinence and mortification; whose ordinary mode of living was not as the dwellers of the city or the town or the village. These people erected no permanent houses; that is to say, the individual member for himself; they planted

no vines; they sowed no seed; they were living under the government of one whom they recognised as their superior; their lives seemed to be full of occupation, for in no other way could we account for the maintenance of this spirit that characterised them and made them so faithful to the Law and the Traditions. The promise given them by the word of Jeremias helps to make more convincing the reasons alleged for the identification we have spoken of—" Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts the God of Israel: There shall not be wanting a man of the race of Jonadab the son of Rechab, standing before Me for ever." The fact that the head of the family is called " father " brings us to the old custom introduced in the times of Elias, when he himself had been given the title of " Father " of " the sons of the prophets." When it is added that precepts have been given and kept, it recalls the days of the institution of the prophetic schools. The mission of Elias was to preserve the faith in the hearts of the people, and, thus, to prepare the way for the Messias. In no other way can we satisfy the demand of historians when they question the place given to Elias and his successor, Eliseus, in the pages of Holy Writ. As founders of an institution which is the last until the days of the Messias they are worthy of the dignity given them in the Books of Kings.

There is a constant tradition, not only in Christian nations, but in nearly all nations, that men who followed (we must not venture to say how far or how faithfully) in the footsteps of the prophets of Carmel, Elias and Eliseus, were on Carmel in the days of the Messias, and then on through the centuries; however, for the present, our interest in the dynasty of the " sons of the prophets " ceases with the days of John the Baptist, who has been rightly called " the first Christian Carmelite," who travelled the deserts and the high-

ways, clothed in " his mantle of camel's hair," and subsisting on " locusts and wild honey "—in a word, clothed as the early Carmelites were and observing their rule of abstinence, and, at the same time, fired with the zeal that recalled to the minds of the men of his generation the Prophet of Carmel, called also the Prophet of Fire.

Other groups of ascetics, seemingly of the same class as the first Carmelites, were to be found during the centuries that elapsed between the days of Elias and the coming of Christ; they were inmates of cells and caverns near to the Jordan and the Dead Sea. In fact, there seemed at times to be a galaxy of such men preparing, in their own humble way, for the coming of the Messias. It would be almost an impossibility that in the course of time the " sons of the prophets," here and there, would not deviate from their rule, and at times, perhaps, pass away from the original devotion of the hermits. The history of mankind affords us many painful examples which show us that even the most perfect and satisfying rule for men on their journey to the spiritual kingdom is no protection against unrestrained zeal or imprudent relaxation; hence, we find the mention, in the profane history of the years about which we now write, of the sects and the schools formed by zealots or fashioned by apostates.

How near the Zadikim or the Chasidim approached to the real spirit of the Law and Traditions is not our province to consider; neither can we introduce the question of the similarity in life and observance between the Rechabites and the Chasidim and the "sons of the prophets." We shall content ourselves by quoting the historical dictum of one who was not likely to favor the Church—" From Moses to Malchi there was an interrupted succession of these public teachers (that is to say, prophets), who testified against the misdoings

of the people, labored to call them back to a sense of their duty, and comforted and animated the pious and sincere by their predictions of future blessings. For the propagation of learning, colleges and schools were erected for the prophets. These students were called sons of the prophets. They were educated under a master (who was a prophet), and they were thereby qualified to be public teachers. It seems that the prophets were generally chosen out of these schools."

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE PROPHET OF CARMEL—A VISITOR

We must distinguish between the visits made by the Prophet of which we have undoubted testimony and those visits that are, what might be termed, mere hearsay, or, at least, that have come to us as mere legends.

The visit of the future, about which we have treated in a former chapter, appears to us to have sufficient authority to be regarded as an event to which Christians may look forward with confidence. Since the first "passing" of the Prophet, we have at least one visit of his to the world about which we cannot doubt, namely, the appearance on Mount Thabor at the side of the transfigured Son of Man.

Moses was the great Leader and Law-giver of "the chosen people." Elias was to the prophetic tribe what Moses was to the people. The Jews were well aware that he who had led them from the land of bondage to within view of the Land of Promise, and who had also been made the medium of the God of Israel when He wished to give the people the Law, could not bear testimony to one who would try to undo the great work already accomplished, and who, by his doctrine, might lead the people from the paths of truth; hence, the appearance of Moses on Thabor was a condescension of the Lord to the tribes of Israel and Juda. In the same way, the appearance of Elias must surely satisfy the minds of the most zealous sons of Israel that the Messias, then transfigured on Mount Thabor, had come to continue the Law and the Traditions in so far as they applied to the men who then were living

according to the Rule and after the manner of the first prophets. It is, then, in the following manner that one of the Fathers of the Church reasons—" He who had been zealous with such burning zeal for the Lord God of hosts would never bear witness to One Who maintained that He was the Equal of the God of Israel if it were not really so." This scene on Thabor has so occupied the minds of the Fathers and the Doctors of the Church that volumes might be filled with their comments. It is sufficient for us to say that the appearance of the Prophet side by side with the Son of Man is a clear and full testimony that Elias was the greatest of all prophets.

Following, as a kind of corollary, on this certain fact of the appearance on Mount Thabor, there are two traditions—which, however, are nothing but pious traditions—handed down by the hermits and the ascetics of early Christian times, namely, that Elias was visited by the Crucified Saviour during the three days when His Body was in the tomb. It was natural that those holy men should exalt their sacred vocation by giving it such a prominent place at a time when a more secure tradition tells us that Christ visited those souls who had been detained in places of punishment, because the Gates of Heaven had been closed against them since the Fall of Man. As Elias, according to their teaching, was yet in the body and in some place which was certainly not heaven—neither was it a place of punishment—they drew the conclusion very acceptable to the prophetic mind that he who had labored so long and so successfully for the coming of the Messias would receive a visit from the Bearer of the Glad Tidings. The second pious tradition is based on the words of the Acts of the Apostles, wherein is narrated the Ascension of our Lord into heaven—" And while they were beholding Him going up to heaven, behold

two men stood by them in white garments." What more natural than that the followers of the Prophet in rule of life and spirit should conclude that these were the two witnesses who had appeared with the Son of Man on Thabor; hence, according to their traditions, Elias also assisted at the wondrous scene on Olivet.

For the visits of Elias or for the apparitions attributed to him in the early years of the Church, perhaps even till the tenth century, we must have recourse to the pages of the Rabbis or the narratives which tell us of the East, and those particularly relating to the Bedouin life. Devout pilgrims have seen him at those places dedicated to his memory; at the little church built at the supposed cell at Carith; in the cave on the Mount of Horeb; under the trees where he rested in his forty days' flight; at the wells whereat he was said to have quenched his thirst. During all those centuries the spirit of Elias was, indeed, abroad; he was an ever-recurring topic for the commentators of Jewry; his presence seemed to haunt persistingly the Musselman pilgrim. Twice a week his spirit rested in the little Oratory built to his memory where the waves of the Mediterranean approached Sarephta, which, they say, was once blessed by his presence.

Not a few have been pleased to identify with Elias the son of Eleazar—*i.e.*, Phinees—because of his zeal in chastising the unfaithful Israelites. Of him the Lord says—"Phinees the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned away My wrath from the children of Israel: because he was moved with zeal against them, that I Myself might not destroy the children of Israel." For his fearless work he was gifted by the Lord with the priesthood forever to him and his seed. We hesitate to accept the identification, because there are very many points of distinction between the Prophet of Carmel and the zealous Phinees. Phinees

was not a celibate, and Elias was; there is no reason for assuming that Elias was anything of the nature of a High Priest, a dignity bestowed upon Phinees. However, there are so many reasons to be given that it would be taxing the patience of the reader to enumerate them. In the same way, we do not at all accept the legend that makes Elias the nephew of Solomon, even though the Prophet displayed wonderful prudence and knowledge in his office of prophet, and may have rivalled Solomon in wisdom as he far exceeded him in zeal for Israel.

The legend that makes Elias appear for the second time as John the Baptist has a great deal more to recommend it; but, taking the words of our Lord in their ordinary acceptation, it must be at once rejected. It is true that the angel said to Zachary—" He shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias "; and the manner of life of the Baptist recalls the rule of the " sons of the prophets "—" He shall drink no wine nor strong drink: and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb "; he also wears a " cloak and a leathern girdle." But what seems the strongest evidence for the legend that John the Baptist and Elias are one and the same is the quoting of the words of Malachias—" that he may turn the hearts of the fathers into the children "—and these words are accepted by nearly all commentators as an expression of the work of the Prophet in his second mission, or at his second coming. On the other hand, we have the explicit statement of John himself when asked—" Art thou Elias? And he answered: I am not." Nevertheless, we find in Saint Matthew the declaration of our Lord about John—" And if you will receive it, he is Elias that is to come." Taken by itself, this phrase without the other references to John could easily lead to the conclusion that John the Baptist was not only

a man according to the spirit of Elias, but that he was really the Prophet himself, to whom the words of Malachias were still applicable as to his second mission. However, we have the history of John even from before his birth, and the facts cannot, and do not, permit of the probability of the legend which has been so precious to the Rabbis and to not a few Christians.

In the Western world, at least for many centuries, the glamor of the great Prophet, although well known because of the monastic life, did not exercise so much influence as it did in the Eastern climes. Consequently, we may not expect to find many records of his appearances. Singular to note, we have one famous apparition of the Prophet to the Apostle of the Irish people. The story has been related in many ways, but, briefly, it is as follows—" The Saint, wearied with his labors and his travels, and deeply concerned about the success of his mission, wherein he had experienced many difficulties, but at the same time much success, had laid himself down to rest by the wayside. In the sleep that followed, the devil appeared to him, and would do him bodily violence. The Saint, perhaps because he had spent so many years in the company of the monks and recluses, had recourse to the great Prophet of the Israelites, who, at the prayer of the Apostle, immediately appeared and, as often happened in Israel, the powers of evil disappeared in the presence of the man of God, so the Saint found himself relieved from his persecution."

In the turbulent years that centre around the tenth till the thirteenth centuries we hear of the appearance of Elias on many occasions. At one time he leads the Christian hosts to victory against the Saracens: at another time he battles in Sicily to oust the Mohammedans from the land of the Christian. In a word, he is still carrying on the propaganda against his

old enemies. In the ancient Carmelite Convents may be seen depicted with much expression those appearances of the "Father and Founder" of the monastic life. The constant communication between the monks of the East and the West, intensified often by the migratory life of many of the Brethren, made the life of the great Prophet the common inheritance of all Christians. Hence we see the Mass of the Prophet is celebrated on the altars of the Western Church. The praises of the man of God are heard in the stalls of the monks; and the Priest repeats them from his Breviary. After the massacre of the Carmelite monks on the Holy Mount, towards the middle of the thirteenth century, the cradle-land of the "sons of the prophets" is desolate; but what the East has lost the West has gained. Friars come from the East and settle in various places in the West. They build churches in the name of the great Prophet of the Israelites, and they give monasteries names recalling him and his fatherland. No decoration in any church is complete until the statues of Elias and Eliseus are found—one on each side of the high altar. Throughout the ages of faith the Prophet appears quite often, but always on an errand of charity or on a mission, as of old, for the Lord God of hosts. If so much happens in the busy haunts of men, how often must the Father of the monastic life, the Founder of the prophetic dynasty on Carmel, have appeared in the cloisters of those who were following in his footsteps, and who rejoiced because they thought they were his specially-chosen spiritual children? To answer this question, one should have read the annals of the Carmelite Order, and should have perused those wonderful lives of the servants of God who have found rest under the cloak of the Prophet in Convent and Monastery. We merely call attention to this aspect of the influence the Prophet

has exerted, and still exerts, in the lives of such faithful souls. Only volumes could do even passing justice to this aspect of devotion to Elias.

As we have mentioned in the first chapters, the Prophet is seen by the devout Bedouin on the plains and on the heights of the sacred Orient. In dreams he still counsels the faithful child of the prophet of Mecca. The wandering child of the people of the tribes still communes with him and looks forward to the day when he will restore the ritual of Moses and the traditions of the Patriarchs and prophets—then shall be the long-desired millennium.

Not every son of Israel is privileged to gaze on the celestial form of the Prophet of their race. We take the following story from a Jewish writer; naturally, we do not vouch for its truth or its accuracy, but it serves us to point out an interesting opinion about the appearances of Elias—" One Sabbatai was an enthusiast and filled with the spirit of ancient Israel, and so was privileged to see things that others might not gaze upon." The story refers to one of the ceremonies of circumcision—" the occasion was the circumcision of the first-born son; but as the Mohel (surgeon) was about to operate he asked him to stay his hand. Half an hour passed. ' Why are we waiting?' the guests ventured to ask of him at last. ' Elijah the Prophet has not yet taken his seat,' he said. Presently he made a sign that the proceedings might be resumed. They stared in reverential awe at the untenanted chair, where only the inspired vision of Sabbatai could perceive the celestial form of the Prophet." That the empty chair is to be found in the ceremony of circumcision universally, we could not affirm, but that there is such a custom in particular places cannot be questioned. The idea of the presence of the Prophet is to ensure that the rite is according to the Law and the Traditions.

And of a truth none other has a greater right to watch over the ceremonies of Moses—at least for the Jewish race, which still stares into the future years, anxiously expecting to behold the long-promised Messias. It has been said that his form undoubtedly was seen by the attendants at this ceremony of circumcision on more than one occasion.

We may not conclude this chapter without recalling a fact that is of interest to all who have followed with admiration the career of the Prophet. At stated intervals, when the number of the years of the world's age coincides with some scriptural date—either in part or in whole—strange rumors begin to circulate in the haunts of men; some prophecies are found that quite suit the year, and day, and month; great expectations seize on the minds of men; and at times, too, terrible happenings are eagerly looked for by the terror-stricken and the timid. The year 1000 A.D. brought a host of surmises and prophecies at once to be realised, for every thousand years had its own peculiar millennium. Of course, Elias was to come and set things aright for the Jewish people—and the Christian nations had their own expectations, in which Elias also figured.

When the fateful number of 1666 came, there was sure to be commotion in the ranks of those who love to study what they consider to be biblical hieroglyphics. So seriously do these students of the uncanny take themselves that many otherwise sensible people are very soon caught in the pseudo-prophetic storm.

Of the aforesaid year it is related that—" Elijah the Prophet, in his ancient mantle, had been seen everywhere, simultaneously, drinking wine cups left for him, and sometimes filling them with oil. He was seen at Smyrna on the wall of a festival chamber, and there he was welcomed with compliments and orations and thanksgiving. At Constantinople a Jew met him in the

streets and was reproached for neglecting to wear the fringed garment and for shaving. At once fringed garments were introduced throughout the Empire, and heads, though shaven always after the manner of the Turks and the East, now became overgrown incommodiously with hair . . . . even the Piyas, or ear-lock, again hung down the side of the face, and its absence served to mark off the Kofrim."

Thus it is that every period of time, that corresponds to some biblical occurrence which has caught the minds of the people, produces its harvest of prophets, and soothsayers, and seers, and pseudo-learned biblical harlequins—all are sure to recall the memory of the great Prophet, since his name is inevitably connected with the last days of the world. Then, as is wont in such times, stories are told of his appearances.

If to-morrow every written document, even remotely connected with the name of Elias, were to be destroyed; if his memory in lands outside the kingdom of Israel were to fall into oblivion, there would still be the Elias of the most fascinating land on the face of the earth; a land that has written the history of the Prophet on its mountains; along its sea-shore; in the changing sand dunes; and in the imperishable rocks. It is not too much to say that in every nook and corner of the Holy Land the traces of the Prophet may be found. The sea that laves the sides of the rugged shore-line; the winds that blow across the sandy plains; the sun that throws its rays on hill and dell; the dew that nightly breathes life into the parched soil—all, all, have their story to tell of Elias.

Until Carmel fades from the land of " the chosen people," and until " its head withers " and its body has been swept away by some terrible cataclysm, Israel will not be wanting in a forceful witness to the great Prophet.

There upon Carmel is the " Grotto of the Prophet " —still held in deep veneration, not only by Christians of all denominations, but even amongst the Arabs and the Turks and the Druses. Around and about are to be seen the innumerable caverns which his followers inhabited; and the name to-day is " Schifel Ruban," that is to say, " the caves of the Religious "—and the Religious, of course, were pre-eminently the followers of Elias. Eloquent testimonies of the past are those cells, with windows, and even beds, cut out of the solid rock, and close to them the little fountains distilling their liquid waters, drop by drop. Lower down the mountain there is also a cave fifty feet long, eighteen feet wide, and twelve feet high, which is called the Grotto of the " sons of the prophets." True, indeed, it is in the hands of the Mohammedans, but its testimony is only the stronger. We have already spoken of the " Fountain of Elias," that is still to be seen near the place of sacrifice. The mind must leap over three thousand years before it can understand the little ceremony that the Carmelite Friar to-day performs, every Feast of the Prophet of Carmel, in that little rocky Oratory where once prayed and sang he who commanded the winds and the fires of heaven on the sacred height: the Friar will tell you he is a follower of the Prophet and that he professes the Rule of the " sons of the prophets "—and there he is, in the twentieth century, shearing the raven locks of the children of the desert, just as of old—aye, even as in the days of Elias and Eliseus—the children of Israel and Juda were shorn; and the intention of the minister and the oblates is one with that intention of old—an offering to God—the consecration of a Nazarite.

Carmel is truly a monument to the memory of Israel's greatest Prophet, but it is a monument to the living, not to the dead.

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